

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Friday, July 29, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

The Graduate Lincoln
Legends Ballroom-Devaney Room, 141 N. 9th Street, 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, Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mark Bulger, Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Kimberly Scherbarth, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Kearney; Brent Heyen, Executive Secretary, Lincoln; Cheryl Livingston, Lincoln; Linda Mentink, Columbus.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director of Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finances; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist; Nicole Gothier, Center Counselor; Jessica Bartenbach, Center Supervisor; Suzette Casillas, Accountant I; Gracie Swim, VR Counselor.

Public present: Jim Jirak, Omaha; Katheryn Armstead, Center; client Daylen Lewin, Center client; Zadin Hack, WAGES participant; Izaiah Freeman, WAGES participant; Addison Johnson, WAGES participant; Jessica Beecham, WAGES coordinator; Jason Meddaugh, WAGES coordinator.

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, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the May 7, 2022 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Scherbarth moved to approve the Minutes of the May 7, 2022 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

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

Report from the Commissioners

Cheryl Livingston – Cheryl reported that she attended the NFB National Convention in New Orleans from July 4-10, 2022. Cheryl noted that it was a very good convention with a lot of good information. During the convention, she attended a presentation from Dan Parker who is a blind racecar driver. Dan broke the Guinness World Record driving a vehicle in March 2022, by driving over 211 mph. Cheryl stated that during the convention she visited the exhibit hall where they were displaying a lot of technology items, etc.

Cheryl reported that she has been active with the NFBN as their State Treasurer. They had their Quarterly Board meeting in June. Cheryl stated that she is also a member of the Lincoln Chapter of NFBN.

Kimberly Scherbarth – Kimberly reported that she also attended the NFB National Convention in New Orleans. Kimberly stated that she serves as the NFB secretary on the State Affiliate Board and she is the NFB Newsline coordinator for Nebraska. Kimberly noted that during the NFB Convention she had the opportunity to meet with Scott White who works for the NFB and is responsible for directing the day-to-day operations of NFB Newsline.

Kimberly noted that they are working on getting their At-Large Chapter of the NFB started; and hopefully, they will be an official Chapter in the near future. Kimberly reported that they did hold officer elections for the At-Large Chapter and she will be serving as the Greater At-Large President.

Kimberly stated that NFB is currently holding its Bell at Home Program and she is mentoring a family.

Kimberly reported that she currently works at UN-Kearney in the Disability Services Program; however, she is resigning that position to become a VR Counselor for the NCBVI North Platte District. She will begin employment with NCBVI on August 10. Kimberly noted that today's meeting will be her last as a NCBVI commissioner.

Brent Heyen – Brent reported that he attended the April NCBVI State Staff meeting in York. Brent reported that he works as a blind manager at a hotel in Lincoln and he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day.

Linda Mentink – Linda reported that during this past quarter she has attended two Zoom meetings of the Friends of the Commission (Friends). The Friends is working on getting a website up and going. They have contracted with Doane College for the website development and maintenance. The Friends will have their next regular quarterly meeting on August 2.

Linda stated that she also attended the NFB National Convention in New Orleans.

Linda reported that she serves as the secretary for the NFB in Communities of Faith Division and she is the secretary of the Senior Division in Nebraska. She is also on the State Board and is the president of the NFBN Columbus Area Chapter. Linda noted that she is also involved in the Blindness community in Wisconsin as she is the President of the Alumni Association for the school.

Mark Bulger – Mark reported that he currently serves as the President of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN). Mark noted that it has been a busy year as Omaha was the host city for the ACB National Convention in July. Mark served as the Chair of the Host committee. Mark stated that they had been meeting for about a year to prepare for the convention. Former NCBVI Commissioner Jim Jirak was also on the Host committee. Mark noted that the ACB National Convention was a hybrid convention and he thanked everyone who was able to attend.

Mark reported that originally, ACB was planning to hold a State Convention this Fall, but with all the work put into hosting the National Convention, they decided to wait and hold the ACB State Convention in April 2023.

Mark also reported that he serves as the President of the Omaha Association of the Blind and he serves on the Board of Directors for the Share-A-Fare cab subsidy for the visually impaired.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

I attended the following meetings:

Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC): The highlights of the meeting were that the Governor signed the amendment for Transition services to start at 14 years old rather than 16 years old. SEAC is also looking at amending their procedure policy so they can be able to send letters of support or opposition to the Unicameral and the Commissioner of Education on matters regarding special education that are discussed at the Unicameral.

Within two years, the two largest educational districts in Nebraska will have a shortage of around 2000 teachers, including special education teachers. We talked about priorities for the SEAC for the next few years and I mentioned the importance of Braille Literacy for blind students.

Nebraska Workforce Development Board meeting (WDB): We met on June 10, 2022. The focus of the meeting was a presentation on Ignite Nebraska, an initiative from a community college in Omaha, who will have a six-week program to train people with minority backgrounds to have a certificate on computer programming. This will produce more workers in the technology area to fill the jobs in the areas where needed. At the end of the meeting, I mentioned that we need to have people employed in the state. NCBVI trains blind individuals across the state to get jobs, but we now cannot fully do this because we are short of staff, as we are unable to pay people what they deserve. I made the comparison with VR General, as their counselors make more money than our counselors do.

NCSAB Executive Committee monthly meeting: We discussed what type of platform the Fall Conference will be (in-person, hybrid, or a combination of both). The NCSAB Fall Conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas from November 2-4, 2022.

We also talked about Randolph-Sheppard, the most recent item being the distribution of Federal funds during COVID, where eight states were late distributing the funds to their blind vendors. This is making RSA look bad because there was a lot of pressure put on the need of such funds. The other Randolph-Sheppard item is the ongoing situation of future electric charger locations in the interstates. There is not clear guidance on this at this point. The Federal Government so far states that it will be up to each state, but the state has not received guidance from them to move forward.

NFB is asking the U.S. Congress to increase the OIB funds from 33 million to 295 million and is asking NCSAB to write a letter of support.

Calls with RSA as President-Elect of NCSAB: We talked about the contract with the Navy in California for a cafeteria. The Navy put an inquiry to RSA asking for an opinion about the

Randolph-Sheppard priority. RSA did not respond; therefore, the blind applicant did not get the contract. The danger of this is that it would set a precedence, and, blind vendors would not get federal contracts across the country for federal cafeterias. On another issue, the Deputy Assistant Secretary mentioned that around 300 million dollars that were not used for VR services went back to the Federal Government. This is mainly because of the inability to hire rehabilitation professionals. Finally, the Fiscal Unit clarified that states could use VR funds for public service announcements, but not for promotional items.

The Olmstead Steering Committee highlights:

We came up with goals from now up to 2024. These goals include increase affordable housing for people with disabilities, including rental housing; economic development, increase jobs for people with disabilities; reduce the number of homeless and provide better services to this population; and provide more assistance to people with HIB. In addition, the State plan will be presented with new and updated goals regarding education, transportation, and employment.

Olmstead Advisory Committee highlights:

Affordable homes for people with disabilities. HHSS/NDD will be using ARPA funds to build up to 300 apartments to help people with severe disabilities. A couple of members mentioned that they noticed construction of more assistant aid homes, instead of providing better independent living services. We also discussed using Zoom for our meetings as WebEx is not friendly.

National Consumer Conventions:

I attended both the ACB National Convention and the NFB National Convention. At the ACB National Convention, in addition to have a table at the exhibit, NCBVI participated in a couple of breakout presentations. One was regarding our NBE services and the other was regarding our Transition services. One of the highlights at the NFB National Convention was that a Resolution was introduced to increase OIB funds to be distribute to all states.

In May, I attended the Omaha Association of the Blind meeting and gave the consumers a report about our agency and I answered questions that they had.

The state of Nebraska got a new E1 system. The system seemed to be inaccessible, but after further conversation with the OCIO, it was noted that the OCIO needed to turn the accessibility mode on so blind employees could use it.

We will have an OIB conference August 30 - September 1 in Kearney. We are sub-contracting for this conference with Sky's the Limit - Eileen Rivera Ley and David DeNotaris. Both Eileen and David have nationwide experience running these kinds of programs.

Erin Brandyberry is heading a project in which we can provide CCTVs to public libraries, senior centers, and American Job Centers in Nebraska.

We continue to work on the corrective action plan for RSA. We got RSA's response from the third quarterly report, in which they stated that corrective actions are around 75% completed. I submitted the fourth Quarterly Report on July 28.

Kat Carroll completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports, which were due in June 2022. She continues updating existing policies and writing new policies in response to the Monitoring review in September 2020. Kat also worked on the FFY 2021 RSA 15 with the assistance of Dave

Robinson and Eric Buckwalter. Kat has also begun working on the next Biennium budget request, which is due on September 15.

On June 30, Kathy Stephens attended, in my place, the Diner Advisory Board meeting at the Deterrence Diner, which is located at the Offutt Air Force Base.

We are still short of staff in most areas - Omaha, North Platte, the Center, NBE and the technology manager.

II. Human Resources

Ashley Jackson resigned her VR Counselor position at the end of May to start her own business. Larry Oleson resigned to pursue opportunities in the private sector and his last day with us was July 12. Timothy Jefferson resigned and his last day was June 1, he took a management position with the Nebraska Department of Labor. Mike Rains retired on July 15, 2022.

Vanessa Kunz started to work for us on May 23 as the second front desk person. We hired Graciela (Gracie) Swim for the VR position in the Norfolk area. Gracie started her Center training on July 25. Kathy Navrkal finished her Center training in mid-June and is now working as an orientation counselor in the Norfolk area. Craig Kneifl finished his Center training during the first week of July and is working as a VR counselor in Omaha. We offered the North Platte District VR position to Kimberly Scherbarth, and she will start working for us on August 10.

We are still recruiting for the orientation counselor and technology specialist positions for Omaha, and the two orientation counselor positions for the Center (one for Mike Rains position and the other for Laurie Jacobsen's position).

Connie Daly, Erin Brandyberry and Cristal Dimas were recognized as Trailblazers during the NCSAB Spring Conference.

Erin Brandyberry attended the OIB Program Manager's Conference in Denver, Colorado in May.

Jeff Altman and Nicole Gothier completed Diabetic Alternatives training this quarter with Mary Davis.

Jessica Bartenbach participated in two interactive panels discussing ethics that were hosted by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Jessica also attended the second session of the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute in May 23-27.

Some staff attended the 21st Annual Rehabilitation and Orientation and Mobility conference in Early July. Some attended in person and some virtually.

Several of our staff attended the ACB National convention and the NFB national convention. Some staff attended in person and some virtually.

The NCBVI Fall State Staff meeting will be held September 27-29 in Kearney.

III. Field Services

Most field staff received training on the use of Apple Pencil and are currently using this tool with clients.

Several staff participated in the summer programs for our transition clients, including finding summer jobs in their communities. We had a couple of clients attend the second level of Robotics training in Virginia.

Staff continue to network with stakeholders all over the State to build trusting relationships, and thus, find training and placement opportunities. Some of our staff are participating in transition committees, Project Search, WIOA Local Boards, NCECBVI Vision Partners meetings, retirement homes, clubs, youth programs, and businesses to mention a few.

This year, we are contracting with JB&K, Jessica Beecham, to administer the WAGES program. We have 11 participants.

Project Independence (PI) has a technology focus this year. We have 13 students that are attending. We also have two Teachers of the Visually Impaired that are working the program. It was noted that the Friends of the Commission fund the PI program.

We have started contracting with some former staff to help with group teaching sessions and referrals. We will be starting these group teaching sessions in August.

The Omaha district continues to work with Mutual of Omaha to do a company-wide training for their IT staff on accessibility in October.

On July 22, our staff did a statewide training for the Department of Labor on the accessible technology that is available at the American Job Centers.

Connie Daly is serving on a committee with Nebraska VR, as they have received a grant to provide training to counselors and providers on Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI).

Angie Hoff, North Platte district VR counselor, hosted a booth at an agency fair with ESU 13, and conducted a fall prevention workshop for older individuals with vision loss at senior centers.

Staff continue to do outreach to older blind consumers, especially to motivate them to come to the OIB statewide conference on August 31-September 1.

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

OIB clients was 464.

IL clients under 55 was 88.

VR clients was 458.

This quarter we had clients get jobs as:

- Administrative Service Manager
- Adult Basic/Secondary Education/Literacy Teacher
- Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic
- Cashier

Civil Engineer
Counter Attendant/Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop
Customer Service Representative (2)
Eligibility Interviewers/Government Programs
First-Line Supervisor (Retail)
Food Preparation/Service-Related Worker
Fundraising Manager
Janitor/Cleaner
Maid/Housekeeper Cleaner
Nursing Assistant
Printing Press Operator
Production Worker
Proofreader/Copy Marker
Randolph Sheppard Vendor (5)
Receptionist/Information Clerk
Security Guard
Stock Clerk/Order Filler
Substance Abuse/Behavioral Disorder Counselor, and
Teacher/Instructor

IV. Training Center

We are still contracting with a graduate of the Center to work approximately 10 hours per week with students on cooking and cleaning skills at the apartments until the position is filled.

With Mike's retirement, there will be four instructors at the Center. Office days will be eliminated in order to maintain coverage for all classes Monday-Thursday. Fridays will be used as a flex day where students will participate in training for a shorter day working on techniques of daily living, philosophical discussions, vocational seminars, challenge activities, drop routes, and they may also meet with their staff advisor for guidance and counseling. Once the students go home for the day, staff will have an opportunity to plan lessons, write reports, continue professional development, and participate in staff meetings.

We have four participants in training, three clients and one staff trainee. Several students and staff trainees completed their training. Number of participants at the Center is expected to increase once summer is over.

During this quarter, there were three tours and one three-day stay. One of the tours was approximately 14 students from the Union College Occupational Therapy Assistant.

Students participated in a Zoom vocational seminar coordinated by the National Federation of the Blind to learn about self-advocacy. Additional sessions are expected to be held on a monthly basis, with future sessions open to all VR clients. The next session will be over Zoom and the topic will focus on soft skills and professional etiquette.

TDL's were held twice this quarter and the topics included cleaning bathtubs, vacuuming and care of vacuum cleaners. Seminars continued to be held weekly in person. Most seminars were planned and led by students with staff assistance.

Students participated in a few activities, including a trip to the Farmers Market in downtown Lincoln, an etiquette and fine dining activity at the Center, and all students were invited to a fellow student's commencement meal.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

Federal Sites:

Under new RSA guidelines, all federal sites that were directly sub-contracted by NCBVI have now been assigned to blind vendors. These sites remain sub-contracted through the agency due to existing contracts, with the commission going to the vendor, instead of to unassigned funds.

State Sites:

Vending machines were added to the breakroom serving staff of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and other commodities-based agencies. The building is in the Fallbrook area of Lincoln and a vendor was already servicing a breakroom serving other agencies in this building.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

The NBE program currently has thirteen blind vendors. NBE is aware of several individuals who wish to explore joining the program.

Cantaloupe

All vendors have now made the migration to the new NCBVI Cantaloupe Master Account. NBE staff will now be approaching Cantaloupe about their offer to let a few vendors test Seed Cashless Plus, Cantaloupe's Vending Management Software (VMS). VMS allows vendors to see the contents of their machines remotely. This, among other things, allows vendors to pre-kit product without first visiting the machine; thus, reducing trips to sites.

EMV compliance has been a concern for some vendors as we approach the August cut-off date for readers to be in compliance with new EMV rules. This spring, NBE identified only five machines that were not in compliance with what is required for the new EMV rules and worked to get these machines up to date.

NEW MACHINES

All of the machines ordered last summer have now been installed, with the exception of a few that are in storage due to their location undergoing renovations.

A Lincoln 4-H group that focuses on STEM related areas did a field trip to the NCBVI office in Lincoln to learn about how vending machines operate. On May 24, five students age five to nine and their grandparents came for the visit. Eric briefly talked to them about what NCBVI does for individuals and why we have vending machines. Eric also provided them with a brief history of Randolph-Sheppard. Students learned how each machine operates to dispense products. Participants then got to watch and learn about how different vending machines operate. Test vends were done on each machine with doors open so the students could see how all of the parts moved. There were lots of good questions asked. It was a great learning experience for all.

NFB Newsline update

Kimberly Scherbarth
NFB Newsline Outreach Coordinator for Nebraska

We currently have 2138 Newsline subscribers in Nebraska, of which, four were added in May 2022. Total call minutes for both May and June 2022 were over 11,1000 and total online accesses were 11,728 in June (this includes web, mobile, and email). We continue to see more subscribers accessing magazines, 97 in April, 340 in May, and 254 in June. These numbers are much higher than the first quarter of the year where January was 33, February was 41, and March was 36.

As a reminder, I am able to add new subscribers for Nebraska, as an alternative to completing the online form on the NFB Newsline website.

The agenda for the 2022 National Federation of the Blind National Convention was available via NFB Newsline. NFB State of Nebraska affiliate President Jamie Richey and I met with Scott White from Baltimore during National Convention. Scott White answered questions about NFB Newsline and said that they will be providing training for state coordinators in the near future.

Breaking news continues to provide articles regarding COVID 19, pulled from various news sources. At-home COVID testing instructions are also listed within the breaking news section.

Many subscribers experienced difficulties with the NFB Newsline Mobile 3.1 update and a temporary work-around was emailed to all subscribers during mid-July.

2022 NFB Newsline Stats

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Number of Subscribers:	2139	2140	2133	2134	2138	2138
New Subscriptions:	4	1	1	2	4	0

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	1033	671	692	740	786	778
Average call length: (Minutes)	14.41	15.56	13.44	14.77	14.39	14.3
Percent local calls:	39.8	55.35	50.13	49.34	40.66	45.78
Total call minutes:	14880	10440	9301	10928	11309	11127

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	5726	4956	6069	6391	6813	5801
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	487	445	547	491	439	427
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1474	1388	2023	2438	6179	4892
Email Deliveries:	556	496	587	560	587	608
Total Online Accesses:	8243	7285	9226	9880	14018	11728

<u>Total Content Accesses:</u>	5072	4158	5042	5566	9266	7990
Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	8.8	9.71	8.85	7.76	4.82	5.41
Nebraska Newspapers:	3627	3377	3339	3310	3942	3365
Nebraska Local Channels: Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	42	24	24	21	27	15
	179	139	238	239	286	255
National Newspapers	1220	969	1105	1178	1538	1575
International Newspapers:	0	1	0	0	1	0
My Newspaper:	75	70	41	88	72	78
Breaking News Online	218	187	177	159	765	448
Nmagazines:	33	41	36	97	340	254
TV Listings	464	301	372	287	306	337

Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

Focus Topic: Transition Services

Presented by Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director of Services

NCBVI has always recognized the importance and need for transition services as early as possible for youth in Nebraska. NCBVI prides itself on being a leader in providing meaningful work experiences, job exploration counseling, work readiness skills, postsecondary education exploration, training in independent living skills, self-advocacy, and peer mentoring opportunities to blind and visually impaired youth to ensure a successful integration into society. NCBVI provides Transition Services to youth ages 14-24. WIOA placed an emphasis on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), for students with disabilities ages 14-21. NCBVI is mandated to invest fifteen (15) percent of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funds on Pre-ETS services. WIOA promotes a smoother transition for Pre-ETS students and youth from school to work through a greater focus on job exploration, work readiness skills, postsecondary exploration, work-based learning experiences, and self-advocacy skill development for blind and visually impaired youth.

Statewide Data

NCBVI has agency staff who provide services on a statewide basis in order to strengthen the relationships with schools, families, and local employers in order to ensure short-term and long-term success for blind and visually impaired youth. Below are statewide data and highlights from some of the programs NCBVI provided to increase independence and confidence in the youth served.

1. Number of transition-aged youth who attended Center training: served 7
2. Total number of transition-aged youth (14-24): served 214
 - A. Number of Pre-ETS students: served 146
 - B. Number of PE (Potentially Eligible) youth/students: served 4
 - C. Number of SE (Supported Employment) Youth: served 66

- D. Number of youths doing work experiences: 33
- WAGES: served 11
 - Giving tours and working the information desk at the Nebraska State Capitol, Shredding documents for a county government office, Performing pet grooming and other related tasks, Bussing tables, and helping with food prep at IHOP, Researching and creating an exhibit on important people who are blind in Nebraska for the Nebraska History Museum, Bussing tables and doing dishes at a campus cafeteria, Bagging orders for customers at a grocery store, and Working with children at a daycare
 - WBLE (Work Based Learning Experience): served 12
 - Department at Autumn Pointe, Dietary Department at Autumn Pointe, General skills at Lavendar's, General skills at Culver's, General skills Branding Iron Café, Dietary Aide at Country House, General business/office skills at Agape Medical Staffing, Office work at The Morgan Company, Job Skills at Gerald Dunbar Ranch, General skills at Dollar Fresh, General skills at Adam's Dollar Market Corner, and General soft skills at Happy Faces Child Care
 - SE youth work experiences: 7
 - Maid/Housekeeper at Wakefield Health Care Center, Cashier at Maize Popcorn Company, Customer Service at Super Saver, Crumble Cookie, Janitor/Cleaner at McDonald's, Fast food worker at Scooter's Coffee, and Fast-food worker at Runza
 - Non-SE Youth Employed with permanent jobs: 3
 - Cook at Raising Canes, Dishwasher at Raising Canes, and Preschool Teacher at Reed Family Early Learning Academy

NFB Career Mentoring Program

NCBVI continued its partnership with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) for the fourth and final year, which continued to provide robust and innovative Pre-ETS services. The new reality has required us to adapt virtual learning modules to approximate a comparable level of engagement and learning. There is a monthly hosted audio/video conference, which focuses upon critical pre-ETS skills such as: Mastering the Job Interview, Financial Literacy, Advocating for yourself on College Campus, and Navigating the Online Job. Finally, mentoring relationships are cultivated and nurtured to substantively contribute to lifelong learning and toward living the lives blind and visually impaired Nebraska consumers want.

Robotics

Last summer, NCBVI provided a Robotics workshop for the first time. As a continuation of this program, NCBVI sent two students to Virginia to participate in the second level of robotics, which specialized in web development and design. These two blind students had the opportunity to explore careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) areas. The program was run by STEM educators who are part of Cyber.org. This workshop allowed these two blind and visually impaired high school students to explore web development and design. One of these blind students will be participating in a Virtual Cyber Warrior Program in July. Due to being short staffed, NCBVI was unable to hold a robotics camp this summer in Nebraska, but has plans to hopefully, once again, hold a robotics camp in the summer of 2023.

Winnerfest

Winnerfest is a program for teenagers ages 14-18 that takes place twice a year in the spring and fall. Due to NCBVI being short staffed, the Fall 2021 program was not held. However, the theme of the Spring 2022 program was, "STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) Careers." NCBVI contracted with Wedland Group who worked with students to inspire curiosity, get them excited about science, and understand that their lack of eyesight need not hold them back from pursuing their dreams. Dr. Hoby Wedler of Wedland Group LLC has been blind since birth. Being around a totally blind role model proved to be extremely positive for the students. Hoby delivered two presentations, designed and implemented an opening ice breaker activity, provided relevant context to the art project of paint pouring performed by the students, and, along with his business partner, Justin Vallandingham, carried out several engaging, educational, and entertaining scientific experiments such as Flavor chemistry with jelly bellies, butterscotch candies, and pop rocks; Miracle Frooties: Temporarily Blocking Acid Receptors in the tongue to make sour foods taste sweet; The Power of Liquid Nitrogen: Freezing Items Instantaneously; Liquid Nitrogen Ice Cream; Water-absorbing Polymers: Polymers that absorb water and swell up; and Endothermic versus exothermic reactions. All scientific activities and hands on experiments were directly related to the industrial world and job seeking. The students loved being able to gain a deeper understanding of how science is literally taking place in all kinds of industries. They also very much enjoyed learning how they, too, could participate effectively in hands-on laboratory experiments.

Project Independence

Project Independence (PI) is a summer camp for youth to immerse themselves in blindness skills training and enrichment activities. This program is designed to elevate expectations for blind students and build upon advocacy and social skills. This four to five-day camp is for children 8-13. The theme for this summer's camp was "Adventures in Technology: Problem Solving with Technology for Home, School, Work and Fun!" The children participated in activities such as: Camp Scavenger Hunt, Yarn Art Project, Beeper Ball, Practice Makes Perfect (Rotating Classes: Braille, Cane Travel, Technology, Techniques of Daily Living), Swimming, Bowling at the Mark Bowling Alley, Employment Activity: PI Ice Cream Shop, 3D Doodle Project, Beeper Disc Golf, Campfire, Home Chore Challenge , and a field trip to Lincoln for a descriptive movie and an employment exploration experience at A Taste of Antonio's. There were also two Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI's) that worked the program, which helped to build relationships and share our knowledge. There were some students who were not able to attend PI, but these students will be able to attend the quarterly follow-up sessions with the technology focus to be able to work 1:1 with staff as well as meet other blind and visually impaired students. This year's PI, technology, and quarterly follow-ups were funded from grants sought out by Friends of the Commission.

College Workshop

NCBVI is once again planning a College Workshop for blind and visually impaired students. NCBVI will be contracting with David DeNotaris from Sky's the Limit to coordinate this program. NCBVI is looking at having this program in late September 2022. This is still in the very early stages of planning, with more to come as details are planned.

Outreach and Collaboration

During this past year, NCBVI has continued to make efforts to strengthen relationships with teachers of the visually impaired (TVI's) and other education providers by contacting Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in order to reach out to as many youths as possible. NCBVI continued to reach out to schools introducing ourselves and reminding staff that we are the VR agency for blind and visually impaired youth in Nebraska. In addition, NCBVI has entered into a MOU with

NDE to define our roles and outline the Pre-ETS services we may provide to blind and visually impaired youth during their school transition years.

NCBVI continues to collaborate and partner with the Nebraska Center for the Education for Children Who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI). NCECBVI is a statewide program and facility for blind school-aged youth based out of ESU (Educational Service Unit) 4. NCBVI participated as a virtual stakeholder in NCECBVI's annual advisory meeting, participated on the hiring committee for the new NCECBVI Director, and partnered on collaborative programming opportunities. NCBVI staff also conducted group training sessions in the NCECBVI facility, which are designed to help severely disabled students strengthen their social and work skill abilities. These group trainings consisted of interactive role plays, games, and activities that focused on common workplace scenarios and experiences and included such topics as Appropriate Workplace Behavior; Conflict Resolution; Examining workplace conditions for each student's current career goal; Blindness in the workplace; Real-world and hypothetical problem-solving scenarios; Mock Interviews; Job interview do's and don'ts; and Disclosing blindness as a job seeker. The goal was to provide information that was both relevant and salient to teenagers in the context of finding and maintaining a part-time, after-school job, which is a typical entry point for people entering the workforce. Students were able to relate their own school and pre-employment experiences to the activities.

NCBVI staff continue to help plan and present at various ESU Transition Conferences. NCBVI staff sit on various regional committees of special education directors and transition professionals, which include the State Transition Advisory Committee and the Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council. Furthermore, NCBVI staff present at various schools about blindness, which include elementary, secondary, and postsecondary, in particular, UNL's Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Program. In conclusion, increasing NCBVI's visibility and community awareness continues to be a priority. It is NCBVI's belief that relationships, partnerships and programs have led to growth in the professional collaborations for training the blind and visually impaired youth to become contributing members of society.

WAGES

The WAGES program, (Work and Gain Experience in the Summer) is a six-week long summer program for youth 14-18 designed to empower them with practical work experience in career areas of their choice as well as learn advocacy and social skills by being exposed to blind role models. During the program, participants are provided with a solid base for vocational planning. Students also get a taste of what it is like to live away from home, as participants live in a dormitory setting on UNL's campus. This year, NCBVI contracted with JB&K (Jessica Beecham and Kevin Kovacs) Services to plan and coordinate the WAGES program. WAGES once again partnered with local employers to provide summer work opportunities for the students, providing valuable work skills. Students were expected to come to work on time, behave in a professional manner on the job site, and perform job duties as assigned. Students participated in various seminars, which covered topics such as: Job readiness; Accessible technology; Blindness organizations, Food labs; and Blind entrepreneurship. During evenings and weekends, students participated in a variety of challenge activities, designed to expand their boundaries, and push them out of their comfort zones. Activities included: Swimming, an audio-described movie, a walk to an ice cream parlor, axe throwing, archery, an overnight camping trip with paddle boarding, a group pedal bike therapy ride, rock climbing, and orienteering. Students and parents also had the opportunity to attend either the American Council of the Blind (ACB) National Convention or the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) National Convention.

Report from WAGES Participants and Coordinators

Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director of Services, reported that since NCBVI is currently short of staff and no longer has a Transition Coordinator position, this year we contracted with JB & K Services to run the WAGES program. Jessica Beecham and Jason Meddaugh were present to talk about this year's WAGES program and three WAGES participants were also present to talk about their experiences in the WAGES program.

Jessica Beecham stated that from her perspective it has been a wonderful opportunity for JB & K to work with NCBVI to assist with the WAGES program this year. Jessica stated that she believes that WAGES is the best work experience program in the country. She said that working with NCBVI was great because NCBVI is forward thinking, innovative and yes thinking staff. Jessica stated that believes that it has been a beautiful relationship, this makes facilitating the program so wonderful, and she hopes that JB & K Services did everything that NCBVI wanted from them.

Chair Bulger asked how JB & K Services was able to step in and know how NCBVI wanted them to run the WAGES program. Jessica stated that they worked hand-in-hand with NCBVI staff members Erin Brandyberry, Carol Jenkins and Shane Buresh. Jessica noted that Shane was the NCBVI transition coordinator in prior years, but now he has a new position at NCBVI so they did not work with him as much as they did not want to take him away from his regular duties. JB & K tried not to overwhelm NCBVI staff with questions, but they came in and got a detailed briefing of what had happened in prior years and they developed the WAGES program from all the information they received.

Chair Bulger noted that one of the unique things about bringing in outside contractors to work a program is that sometimes you get a new perspective on how things could be run to enhance the program. Chair Bulger asked Jessica if she could give any examples of things that they felt could be ran differently.

Jessica stated that one example is when working with employers you sometimes get use to some work opportunities that they may have offered in the past. An example is Nebraska History, in the past they offered employment for someone to come in and clean books. Jessica stated that she did not think that was a very exciting job so she asked Nebraska History if they could expand that and have someone come in and conduct research and do other jobs. They then had a WAGES participant work for Nebraska History and she conducted research on blind people and the medical history in Nebraska. This will help History Nebraska create displays that they can put all over town and it will help them create more diversity. Another example is that it is historically hard to find job coaches so they expanded their ways to recruit for these positions. Jessica noted that this helped them to hire enough staff to make sure all the students were supported which resulted in a very positive outcome for everyone.

Chair Bulger asked if JB & K had any relationships with the participants in WAGES in the past or if it was a fresh start. He noted that sometimes there are advantages of doing programs in-house wherein you know the people and their personalities. Jessica reported that JB & K contracted with NCBVI last year to help with the Robotics program. They provided evening staffing and evening activities for the Robotics participants so they knew some of the participants. They took a lot of time to talk to the parents and to the counselors prior to job placement so they could get a strong understanding of each participant's strengths and their opportunities for growth.

Jason Meddaugh reported that it has been a great opportunity to work with NCBVI on the WAGES program. He noted that it is one of the best, if not the best, program for blind people in the country. One of JB & K's main goals was to build good relationships with the employers. Many of the employers they work with are long time employers for the WAGES program. This year, one of the new employers they worked with was IHOP in Lincoln. Two of their participants worked at IHOP during the WAGES program. They were Zadin Hack and Izaiah Freeman. Jason asked Zadin and Izaiah to talk about their experiences while working at IHOP.

Zadin Hack reported that he and Izaiah started working at IHOP because Hy-Vee was unable to work with them because they were not old enough. Zadin stated that IHOP was a great place to work and they taught him many skills such as folding menus and rolling silverware. They also learned how to navigate the Lincoln bus system to get to and from work.

Izaiah Freeman stated that he agrees with everything that Zadin said. Izaiah noted that he learned a lot about navigating the city bus system and at IHOP, they performed duties such as cleaning off tables, folding menus and rolling silverware.

Chair Bulger asked Izaiah and Zadin if either one of them had any prior work experience wherein they received pay. Zadin stated that he worked at a restaurant in his hometown last summer, but it was not as busy and they were not very good at teaching him the skills he needed to do his job. Zadin stated the IHOP was very good about teaching them how to do their job in a timely manner. Izaiah reported that he had never had a work experience before, so IHOP was his first experience and he loved it.

Jessica Beecham noted that part of the WAGES program is also about learning what you do not want to do as a career. This helps the participants understand why they may need to get a good education so they can get a career that they want to do when they are adults.

Jessica next introduced Addison Johnson who worked at K9 Design during the WAGES program and she asked Addison to talk about her job. Addison reported that K9 Design is a place for animals so she got to learn how to navigate the place, clean kennels, vacuum, give animals baths and see other animals. Jessica noted that K9 Design loved having Addison work for them so it was a win-win situation.

Chair Bulger asked Addison what she all enjoyed while being a part of the WAGES program. Addison stated that she liked doing the activities such as the challenge course, swinging on the giant swing and zip lining. Addison noted that she also enjoyed being around the other participants.

The participants stated that participating in the WAGES program will definitely help them prepare for their future.

The commissioners thanked the WAGES coordinators and participants for their presentation.

Break

A break was taken at 10:57 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 11:10 a.m.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

There were no new cases to the Client Assistance Program relating to the NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) during this quarter.

New Business

Officer Elections

Chair Bulger reported that every year at this time, the Board conducts officer elections. The positions on the Board are Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Executive Secretary. Chair Bulger noted that the commissioners only make decisions related to NCBVI when they are together at a Commission Board meeting. Chair Bulger stated that it has been tradition of the Commission for the Chair to step down before his/her term is up so they will be available to mentor and assist the next Chair as needed. Mark noted that since his term will expire within the next year, he would step away from this duty.

Commissioners who currently holds an office gave an overview of their position.

Chair Bulger stated that the Chair oversees the proceedings of the meetings and they work closely with the Vice Chair to put the Commission meeting agendas together. The Chair also tries to make sure that NCBVI is headed in the right direction.

Vice Chair Scherbarth noted that the Vice Chair works with the Chair to put together an agenda for the Commission meetings. After a draft agenda is completed, they reach out to the other commissioners, the executive director and the administrative specialist for the Commission to get their input. The Vice Chair is also responsible for facilitating the Commission meetings if the Chair is not available. It was noted that when putting together the agenda, many of the agenda items are a repeat from the year before since there are certain issues that must be dealt with on a yearly basis.

Executive Secretary Heyen reported that the main duty of the Executive Secretary is to take notes and record the motions at each meeting. The commissioners have an on-going document which shows all the motions made at each meeting. This document must be updated after each meeting. The document is then sent to the Chair, the Vice Chair and the Administrative Specialist. Executive Secretary Heyen added that it is the duty of all commissioners to stay informed on the activities of NCBVI.

Commission Chair Bulger moved to elect Commissioner Heyen as Chairperson. Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion. There were no additional nominations.

Commissioner Heyen accepted the nomination.

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

Nayes:

Motion Carried

Commission Vice Chairperson Scherbarth moved to elect Commissioner Livingston as Vice Chairperson. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion. There were no additional nominations. Commissioner Livingston accepted the nomination.

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

Commission Chair Bulger moved to elect Commissioner Mentink as Executive Secretary. Commissioner Heyen seconded the motion. There were no additional nominations. Commissioner Mentink accepted the nomination.

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

Public comment period

Jim Jirak – Jim congratulated and thanked Chair Bulger for the great job he has done as Chair of the Board of Commissioners.

Jim provided some history as to how it became the duty of the Vice Chair to work on the agenda for the Board meetings. Jim noted that when Julie Johnson was the Chair of the Board, he was the Vice Chair. In an effort to assist her, he took over the drafting of the agenda. Julie was happy to have this taken off her plate as Chair and the duty became a standard duty for the Vice Chair.

Jim noted that he and Mark Bulger will be attending the Older Blind conference in Kearney in late August and ACB will have a booth.

Jim suggested that the NCBVI Chair should try to be at all the Commission Board meetings. He asked if they could consider requesting the time off from work in advance as they will know the dates of the meetings.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on November 5, 2022 in Omaha. The Focus Topic will be Radio Talking Book.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 5, 2022 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist
NCBVI

Mark Bulger, Chairperson

NCBVI Wages banquet and program was held immediately following the meeting at 12:00 p.m.
and all NCBVI Commission Board Members were invited to attend.

Staff Quarterly Reports for July 29, 2022 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Kathy Navrkal finished Center training in June. She is working with OIB clients in the field. We hired Graciela (Gracie) Swim to replace John Schmitt in the Norfolk area. She will start Center training on July 25. Gracie has worked with the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska VR. We are very excited to have her become part of our team.

Our work was recognized by the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. We received Trailblazer Recognition for our work advocating for a client in an employment situation on May 13.

The Lincoln District had five clients attend WAGES. We set up a summer work experience for a client as a host at a restaurant. Jeff, Kelly E., Charli and I will work Project Independence next week.

We had a client attend Linux Camp. This training was provided in Virginia for clients interested in STEM careers. It was provided by the same group who provided Robotics for us.

Jeff, Kelly E., Charli and I attended the National ACB convention in Omaha. Amy attended the National NFB convention in New Orleans.

I am serving on a committee with Nebraska VR as they have received a grant to provide training to counselors and providers on Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). Administration for Community Living (ACL) is working with four states on this initiative. They have identified 40 core competencies for serving individuals with TBI's. ACL is developing 20-minute modules for each competency. The modules will each include a case study. They will have specific staff identified who would be available for questions and clarification for staff that need more information. It is in the early stages of development.

We had clients get jobs as an Architect, Construction worker, Assembler and Security Guard. We helped clients retain employment as a Massage Therapist, Receptionist and Food Service manager.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

Staffing: I am happy to say that Craig Kneifl has completed training and has started working in the field. What a wonderful addition to our staff.

Timothy Jefferson resigned and his last day with NCBVI was June 1. Tim started a new position with the Department of Labor as the Regional Re-Employment Manager.

Larry Oleson also retired and his last day was July 12. Larry left NCBVI for some wonderful opportunities in the private sector.

We have our Vocational Rehabilitation and Orientation Counselor positions posted, but have had few applicants. We are working to post Larry Oleson's position.

Transition: We have two students that are attending WAGES. We had a student attend a Robotics Program in Norfolk, Virginia. This student is also doing a Virtual Cyber Warrior Program in July. We have several work-based learning experiences occurring as well.

Staff Development: We have a staff person who attended the NFB National Convention and four of us attended the ACB National Convention.

NCBVI Programs: Being short of staff we did not assist with WAGES for the first time. We have been working with consumers that are interested in the Older Blind Conference. Kelly Coleman has been working with the Project Independence Committee and coordinating the program for this year. It will have a technology focus. We have 13 students that will be attending. We have two Teachers of the Visually Impaired that are working the program. It helps to build relationships when we can collaborate and share our knowledge.

We have started contracting with some former staff to help with group teaching sessions and referrals. We will be starting these group teaching sessions in August. We are still trying to be mindful of the Covid numbers and use necessary precautions.

Employment: We have a consumer that has completed her PhD and is moving to Ohio. We also have a consumer who was hired as a food service worker (cookie maker). We are working with a couple of employers on job jeopardy cases.

We continue to attend partner meetings, and will have Craig Kneifl join some of the Placement Committees like Employ-Omaha.

We are continuing to work with Mutual of Omaha to do a company-wide training for their IT staff on accessibility. This will be on October 6, 2022, at 11:30 a.m. They are reaching out to other companies across Omaha and Nebraska to have their IT staff participate in this training.

We will be doing a statewide training for Department of Labor on the accessible technology that is available at the One Stop. They will record this training and have it available for new staff and for current staff to remain current on this technology. The training is on July 22 at 1:00 p.m.

NBE: We have three consumers that are interested in the Randolph Shepard Program. We are introducing them to the NBE team, and the Blind Licensee Chair.

I am thankful for the NCBVI team. Working with such a dedicated group of people makes managing a difficult time easier.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Networking:

Angie hosted a booth at an agency fair with ESU 13, conducted a fall prevention workshop for older individuals with vision loss, and met with a childcare employer for a client to start an OJT. Erin and Angie met with a representative from Clusiv regarding employment services they offer for blind job seekers. Cristal and Aaron networked with school professionals at the NCECBVI Sizzlin' Summer Camp. Cristal had employer outreach at Texas Roadhouse, Headstart, Dollar Fresh, and

Adam's Corner Market. Fritz completed outreach to communities who may serve older blind clients.

Projects:

Cristal and Erin attended the NCSAB conference and were nominated and awarded as Trailblazers in the VR setting for their work with a Pre-ETS student where their advocacy and perseverance were key in the student's success. Angie has attended meetings for a Disability Preparedness Presentation that will be given in October. Erin is working with Blind Savvy USA on coordinating the OIB statewide conference called the "Silver Summit" that will be held August 30-September 1. Erin is working with the Nebraska Library Commission to coordinate providing a CCTV to every library in the state of Nebraska, as well as updating CCTVs in all Department of Labor offices for our clients and potential clients to use. Erin provided training to all staff on electronic signatures using the apple pencil. Erin has worked with the Leadership Team on developing a new process for distributing income to clients from NCBVI supported work experiences. Erin meets with the OIB-Technical Assistance Director one time each month and is working on goals for the OIB program, such as updating the consumer satisfaction survey. The North Platte district is down one staff member due to Ashley Jackson resigning, so all district staff are working an increased caseload to cover this.

Training:

Angie, Cristal, and Aaron attended the NFB National Convention in New Orleans. Erin attended the ACB National Convention in Omaha. Angie also took an introductory course on sign language. Erin attended the OIB Program Manager's Conference in Denver, Colorado.

Client Outcomes:

Cristal set up an informational interview and a job shadow for a client who is interested in self-employment with Kearney Therapeutic Horseback Riding. Cristal has clients doing work-based learning experiences at Dollar Fresh and Adam's Dollar Market Corner. Angie has one client doing an on the job training experience at a Childcare Center. Angie had one client enter stable employment as a licensed NBE vendor. Erin had clients enter stable employment in the careers of engineering at Oak Creek, office assistant at ASC Capacitators, and Director of operations at Agape Medical staffing. Our district has four clients attending the WAGES program and six clients attending PI camp.

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

Mike Rains retired on July 15 after more than 37 years working for NCBVI as the Shop Instructor in the Center. He has been an integral part of the team and he will definitely be missed by staff and students alike. In his retirement, he plans to go fishing more often, spend time with his three grandchildren, work on his house, and continue working for LMEP.

The Shop Instructor position has been posted since mid-February. To date, only three applications have been received. Two applicants were offered the opportunity to interview, and both declined, one citing the low salary as the reason. The third applicant was not offered an interview due to not possessing relevant experience. The position continues to be posted until filled. Interested applicants can apply through the Government Jobs web site by searching "shop instructor."

With Mike's retirement, there will be four instructors at the Center. Office days will be eliminated in order to maintain coverage for all classes Monday-Thursday. Fridays will be used as a flex day where students will participate in training for a shorter day working on techniques of daily living, philosophical discussions, vocational seminars, challenge activities, drop routes, and may also meet with their staff advisor for guidance and counseling. Once the students go home for the day, staff will have an opportunity to plan lessons, write reports, continue professional development, and participate in staff meetings.

Approval was recently received to post the Client Resource Counselor position. This is a position within the Orientation Counselor II classification, which will combine the duties of the Apartment Resource Technician vacated by Laurie Jacobsen when she retired in March, and the duties of the Client Services Counselor position which was relinquished in 2019. This will be a full-time position with a flexible schedule based on agency needs and work location. A portion of the week will be spent working at the apartments with students during a non-traditional schedule of 11:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. The rest of the week will be spent working at the Training Center from 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m. assisting students with applying for community resources and addressing issues that will enable them to be more successful in the Center and beyond.

The Client Resource Counselor will also serve as a much-needed substitute instructor in the event that a staff member is absent or working at one of NCBVI's other programs. HR advises that there is a high volume of recruitment requests, so this position will likely post at the end of July or early August. The incumbent will then need to complete 600 hours of sleepshade training in order to receive their CVRCB.

Jeff and Nicole completed Diabetic Alternatives training this quarter with Mary Davis. Mike and Nancy completed the training in December 2021. Jessica and Shane still need to complete this training.

Jessica participated in two interactive panels discussing ethics which were hosted by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Jessica also attended the second session of the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, which was held in San Diego May 23-27. In addition, she participated virtually in the spring conference of NCSAB, and the 21st Annual Rehabilitation and Orientation and Mobility conference. Jeff, Shane, Nancy, and Nicole all attended the National Federation of the Blind convention in New Orleans, and Jessica participated virtually in a portion of both the ACB and NFB National conventions. Jeff attended the in-person Rehab and O&M conference.

Currently the Center has three VR students, which is below average. Between mid-May and the end of June, six students left training. Two of them were staff trainees who completed their 600 hours of training, two students left due to medical reasons, one student graduated, and one student decided to discontinue training rather than remedy behavioral issues. A new student began training on May 16. A 3-day stay is scheduled July 19-21, and a new staff trainee will begin on July 25. The client who completed a 3-day stay during the last quarter, and was contemplating returning for training, is currently employed full-time and will not be attending training at this time.

It is expected that enrollment will increase once the summer programs are concluded, as this is the busiest time for NCBVI as a whole, and all districts are currently short-staffed. During this quarter, there were three tours, and one three-day stay. One of the tours was approximately 14 students from the Union College Occupational Therapy Assistant program. The three-day stay is very

interested in attending Center training but needs to work with field staff to develop some of the prerequisite skills before being admitted to the Center.

Both staff trainees completed their commencement meals in Home Management and also successfully returned from their drop routes. Kathy Navrkal is the new Orientation Counselor serving the Norfolk area, and Craig Kneifl is the new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor serving the Omaha district. They will both be an asset to their clients. Gracie Swim will begin her staff training on July 25. Once completed, she will be the new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the Norfolk area.

Students participated in a vocational seminar coordinated by the National Federation of the Blind to learn about self-advocacy. Additional sessions will be hosted approximately monthly, with future sessions open to all VR clients. The next session is scheduled for July 25 at 1:15 p.m. central time and will be over Zoom. The next topic will focus on soft skills and professional etiquette.

TDL's were held twice this quarter and the topics included cleaning bathtubs, vacuuming and care of vacuum cleaners. Drops were also completed twice this quarter. Seminars continued to be held weekly in person. Most seminars were planned and led by students with staff assistance. A few seminars were led by staff and focused on adjusting to blindness and structured discovery philosophy.

Center students participated in a few activities, including a trip to the farmers market in downtown Lincoln, an etiquette and fine dining activity at the Center, and all students were invited to a fellow student's commencement meal. Additional activities will be planned during the next quarter, including attending the WAGES banquet, Commission Board meeting, and the State convention of the American Council of the Blind.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

Federal Sites

Under new RSA guidelines, all federal sites that were directly sub-contracted by NCBVI have now been assigned to blind vendors. These sites remain sub-contracted through the agency due to existing contracts; with the commission going to the vendor, instead of to unassigned funds.

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Vending machines were added to the breakroom serving staff of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and other commodities-based agencies. The building is in the Fallbrook area of Lincoln and a vendor was already servicing a breakroom serving other agencies in this building.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

The NBE program currently has thirteen blind vendors. NBE is aware of several individuals who wish to explore joining the program.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS

NBE received complaints this past quarter regarding machines not being well stocked, expired product, and unprofessional communication. These situations were promptly addressed. NBE

vendors were reminded that they not only represent their business but also; the NBE program as a whole, other blind vendors, NCBVI, and blind individuals across Nebraska.

Cantaloupe

All vendors have now made the migration to the new NCBVI Cantaloupe Master Account. The transfer, while it took longer than hoped, was almost seamless; with just a few glitches that Cantaloupe worked to resolve very quickly.

A few sites were waiting on this process to be completed so we could assign credit card readers. These sites will now receive readers, with the hope of completing the process this fall. By waiting for the Master Agreement process to be completed, NCBVI saved hundreds of dollars and weeks of wait time.

NBE staff will now be approaching Cantaloupe about their offer to let a few vendors test Seed Cashless Plus, Cantaloupe's Vending Management Software (VMS). VMS allows vendors to see the contents of their machines remotely. This, among other things, allows vendors to pre-kit product without first visiting the machine; reducing trips to sites.

EMV compliance has been a concern for some vendors as we approach the August cut-off date for readers to be in compliance with new EMV rules. This spring, NBE identified only five machines that were not in compliance with what is required for the new EMV rules and worked to get these machines up to date.

NEW MACHINES

All of the machines ordered last summer have now been installed, with the exception of a few that are in storage due to their location undergoing renovations. New machines have been ordered for the upcoming NDCS beverage contract.

The lead-time from manufacturers on new machines is now shorter than it was last year; but it is not as of yet back to pre-COVID time frames.

OTHER UPDATES

Presentations

A Lincoln 4-H group that focuses on STEAM related areas asked if they could do a field trip to the NCBVI office in Lincoln to learn about how vending machines operate. On May 24, five students age five to nine and their grandparents (the groups grandparents are super involved and take their grandkids to meetings when parents work) came for the visit. Eric briefly talked to them about what NCBVI does for individuals and why we have vending machines. Eric also provided them with a brief history of Randolph-Sheppard. The participants then learned about how bill validators, coin mechanisms, and credit card readers work. Students got to examine trays that were pulled from snack and glass front beverage machines; and learned how each operates to dispense products. Participants then got to watch and learn about how BevMax, Crane 186, and Vendo 621 machines operate. Test vends were done on each machine with doors open so the students could see how all of the parts moved. There were lots of good questions asked. Each student got to leave with a bag of chips. It was a great learning experience for all.

At the ACB National Convention in Omaha in early July, NBE was asked to present about the Nebraska Business Enterprise program at their RSVa Conference. Eric Buckwalter, representing the agency, and Sandy Alvarado and Jim Jirak, representing the vendors, took part in a panel

discussion. Eric shared about the agency from the SLA perspective, including stats, figures, and how we weathered COVID. Jim shared about his experience as a vendor and his work history that led him to the NBE program. Sandy, in addition to how she arrived at being part of the program, shared about her experience as the Chairperson of the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors; and her experience as being a woman in a heavily male dominated field.

Eric was asked to be part of a second panel discussion that focused on the benefits of being a vendor in a BEP, what makes a good vendor, and how states recruit and train individuals who are interested in joining their state's BEP.

LOOKING AHEAD

The job listing for the third NBE position was temporarily pulled as NCBVI tried to add some changes to the requirements. The job listing is now relisted with no changes being made.

NBE staff, in conjunction with the NBE Committee, is planning a training day on August 26. After discussion with the Committee Chairperson, we will spend at least some of the time focusing on using promotions to drive sales at machines (and Cafes/Micro Markets).

The SLA and NBE Committee is in the beginning planning stages of a longer retreat-style event in May of 2023.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Continued updating existing policies and writing new policies in response to the Monitoring visit in September 2020. Submitted our 3rd quarterly update and received a response last week from RSA. Continue working on the next quarterly update while we were waiting to see what we need to fix from the third quarter.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports due in April and June 2022.
- Continued training the new Accountant II Tammie Dunn. Tammie is a very quick learner and is already providing a great deal of relief to my workload.
- Continued training Suzette Casillas on front desk duties.
- Hired Vanessa Kunz as the second front desk person. Vanessa is learning her duties very quickly and also teaching Suzette a few new ways to work more efficiently through her knowledge of Microsoft office products. She also is very pleasant at the front desk, so if you haven't talked to her yet, I hope you'll have a chance to do so soon.
- Continued to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2022 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.
- We received the final budget awards after having two sets of Grant Award Notifications under Continuing Resolution.

- Work on the FFY 2021 RSA 15 with the assistance of Dave Robinson and Eric Buckwalter. The deadline of this report has been extended many times and is now due the end of April due to RSA confusion of where to report the FRPP funds.
- Closed out FFY 2020 VR grant that was under a Late Liquidation Request due to continuing work on the AWARE customization projects, the inability to get furniture ordered last summer from Cornhusker State Industries, and the inability to get Vending Machines ordered in July/August. These delays are due mainly to the Global Supply Chain issues. All vending machines have now been received and paid, we are making progress on the two remaining AWARE customization projects, and the Omaha furniture was received and installed.
- Implemented improvements to client supply inventory tracking and the items kept in client supply.
- Continued work on improving communication between the Business Office team as well as communication between the Business Office and the Field Supervisors. A meeting was held with all involved, and monthly meetings will be held to continue this work.
- Continued work on Team Building with the Business Office Team as well as throughout the Agency.
- Begun work on the next Biennium budget request due on September 15.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

I have been working with Surplus Property to have technology items from the Lincoln office hauled to State Surplus, sent to recycling, and/or posted on Gov.Deals for auction.

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 made hotel reservations and completed registrations for staff and clients attending the ACB National Convention. Due to fracturing my wrist in May, Kat Carroll assisted me with making hotel reservations and completing registrations for staff attending the NFB National Convention. I attended the ACB National Convention virtually. I worked with staff to make other travel arrangements for staff and clients as needed.

The NCBVI Fall State Staff meeting will be held September 27 - 29 in Kearney. The meeting will be held at the Younes Conference Center South. I have worked with the hotel on putting together our contract. A final rooming list needs to be submitted to the hotel by August 19, 2022. I am working with Shirts 101 on ordering fleece jackets for the Staff Appreciation gift.

I attended the Diner Advisory Board meeting at the Deterrence Diner on June 30.

Transportation Services Bureau (TSB) is working to update the GPS units in State vehicles from 3G units to 4G units. NCBVI has two vehicles that need to have this update.