

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Public Meeting  
Saturday, November 2, 2019

DRAFT MINUTES

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings, 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; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; Chad Bell, Alliance; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City.

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director for Services; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director for Finance; Adrienne Moody, Orientation Counselor.

Public Present: Valerie Bell, Alliance; Jane Nielsen, Executive Director, Radio Talking Book Services; Ryan Osentowski, Station Manager, Radio Talking Book Services.

It was noted that public comments are welcome during the scheduled Public Comment periods regarding the agenda items or other relevant issues. Kathy Stephens recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Act was available in both print and Braille format. 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 August 3, 2019 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve the Minutes of the August 3, 2019 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Radio Talking Book Service (RTBS)

A presentation was given by RTBS staff Ryan Osentowski, Station Manager and Jane Nielsen, Executive Director.

Radio Talking Book Service (RTBS) provides human-voiced information choices to individuals who have disabilities that prevent them from reading. They will also ensure that every disabled person has equal access to current, local print information necessary to lead a self-directed, productive life.

RTBS just celebrated their 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; going on the air in 1974, as Radio Talking Book Network (RTBN). Over 70 volunteers read print media aloud, either live or as a recording, and their diverse voices are broadcast throughout Nebraska over the radio and internet to blind, low vision, or print impaired listeners.

Nearly all these publications would otherwise be inaccessible to their listeners. RTBS features local nonprofits and agencies on Community Conversations, a live interview program; a Veterans Hour; and special programming features. The voices of RTBS inform, entertain, and alleviate isolation, which often affects people with diminishing vision, providing listeners with companionship.

This human and personal presentation reaches listeners via RTBS's FM radio receivers, an easy-to-use medium provided at no cost to eligible individuals and care facilities. They also have a barix box which is a small box which can be used to plug into a closed circuit television system that a hospital or other care facility may have. RTBS offers no tech support for the barix box.

RTBS's internet stream can be accessed on: their website; personal computers and tablets; two smart phone apps; and two internet receiver options. To increase accessibility for their listeners, RTBS implemented a telephone option, AudioNow, that allows individuals to place a simple phone call and listen to their broadcast from their home or mobile phones. RTBS began podcasts of our daily live newspaper reading in November 2017 and added weekly department store and grocery ads to the podcast offerings in early 2018. These podcasts are available on RTBS's website and iTunes.

RTBS is community served. There are an estimated 39,700 blind or visually impaired individuals in Nebraska, and this population is denied access to more than 95% of published works. RTBS's audience is quite diverse as people lose the ability to read for many reasons, including birth defects and cognitive disorders like dyslexia. Stroke, accident, chronic illness or other infirmities can also impair reading. The increasing incidence of age-related disability, eye disease, and vision loss, which affects up to 25% of persons aged 65 and over, is the most common reason for using RTBS. They are pleased to be able to read the paper to them every day of the year.

Radio Talking Book Network provides local, current print information necessary to lead a self-directed, independent life. Their programming includes the following:

- Newspapers: *Omaha World-Herald, Lincoln Journal Star, North Platte Telegraph, Grand Island Independent, Scottsbluff Star-Herald, Norfolk Daily News, Council Bluffs Nonpareil, Fremont Tribune, Columbus Telegram, The Omaha Star, Kearney Hub, Hastings Tribune, Wall Street Journal*
- Informative: Weekly Department Store & Grocery Ads, Health & Wellness, Consumer Info, Veterans Hour, Science & Environment, Senior Summary, What's Cooking, Community Conversations
- Arts, Culture and Hobbies: Sports, Nebraska Life, Home and Garden, Good Old Days, Pet Pause, Trips & Travel, Entertainment Update
- Entertainment: Bookshelf, Mystery Theater, Poetry, Nostalgia Radio

Commissioner Hansen noted that we have two radio reading services in Nebraska, Radio Talking Book Services and NFB Newsline ®. Commissioner Hansen noted that he is excited to hear that RTBS is getting into the Podcasts so listeners can listen to programs on their schedule. Commissioner Hansen encouraged RTBS to expand the amount of content that they do this with. Ryan Osentowski noted that RTBS is working on this, as Podcasting is the way of the future. Ryan noted that one difference in RTBS and NFB Newsline is that RTBS uses human voices to read the content.

Commissioner Newman asked where the name Barix box came from. Barix is a brand name.

Jane Nielsen invited the commissioners to come and tour the RTBS facilities at any time. Jane Nielsen noted that RTBS's current lease is up in June 2021 so they are looking at different options for their location. They may stay where they are, but they would like to be more centrally located in Omaha.

The commissioners thanked Jane and Ryan for their report on RTBS.

## On-Going Business

Report from the Executive Director

### **I. Administration**

As a result of the increase of our state budget for senior blind services, we are now able to accept senior blind clients at the Center, provide field OIB services without a limit to six or eight visits, and provide group teaching and follow-up training. Where the offices are closed, we will be working with churches or senior centers to use their facilities.

With the new state Senior Blind Funds, our Cost Allocation Percentage will allow us to charge approximately 18% of overhead expenses to OIB/Senior Blind, freeing up VR funds that had covered those expenses in the past. This frees up some basic support funds to serve those on the wait list. We are now training senior blind at the Training center.

We closed all categories under Order of Selection (OOS) and all applicants are receiving services now. We will continue to be in OOS until March 2020, when the Combined State Plan is due.

The State Workforce partners already started to have meetings to write the Combined State Plan. At some point, the commissioners will need to review the NCBVI portion of the State Plan.

NCBVI received around 1.2 million dollars in reallocation funds. This is the first time the agency received this amount of funds. NCBVI will need to spend this money in a year and 15% will need to be spent on Pre-ETS. All the extra money we got from reallocation and the money we get from Social Security reimbursement will only be used on one-time expenses; not on-going expenses. The agency's overall fund budget is around 5 million dollars, from both Federal and State grants. We are already budgeting client services, overhead expenses and staff salaries and benefits in those 5 million dollars. The priority for the 1.2 million dollars in reallocation funds and social security reimbursement funds for this year will

be NBE vending equipment, equipment such as computers and software for staff and sending staff members to training. The remaining money will be used to continue to build our carryover funds.

Kat continues redesigning agency business units to simplify and eliminate unnecessary complications, going from around 500 business units per year to 15. Carol, Kat, and Director Serván attended the CSAVR regional meeting in Kansas City on October 15 and 16 and they were able to network and compare their interpretations of the regulations on the services we provide. The leadership team also met with the leadership from VR General to talk about Pre-ETS and Supported Employment. For Pre-ETS we are under the 15% by \$258,387, after the reallocation. VR is over the 15% around \$800,000, therefore we could combine our 15% requirement. We would use the \$258,387 for basic support which will help tremendously.

Our long time fiscal analyst, Sandy Salstad, retired after 43 years working for the Unicameral. The new fiscal analyst assigned to us is Nikki Swope. Kat and Director Serván met with her on October 17 and explained to her the nature of our services. She also took a tour of our Training Center.

Senator Robert Clements toured our Training Center on October 18 and he said that he did not know everything we did for blind people. He was impressed with the Training Center. We continue to schedule tours of our Training Center so public officials can be informed about the services we provide.

Some of the other events/meetings Director Serván attended were the WIOA Partners meetings, ADA Task Force meetings, NCSAB fall conference, Olmstead State Plan Advisory and Steering committee, and the NFBN State Convention. Director Serván has been invited to present in Utah to blind Spanish consumers on November 16 regarding vocational rehabilitation services and the capability of the blind. Director Serván will be taking vacation time for this event. The NCSAB Executive Committee, where Director Serván is a member, continues working with RSA so they can be more flexible with the interpretation of the Pre-ETS regulations. RSA did come up with some flexibility in prior approval documentation.

Mark Schultz is the new RSA Commissioner. He is realizing that even though he wants to make some changes, the changes still need to go to the office of General Counsel for clearance. Mark Schultz is also the Interim Assistant Secretary for Special Education. He oversees everything for special education. This will help because he has both backgrounds – rehab and special education.

At the NCSAB Fall Conference, they announced that NCBVI is once again in the top five for services in Measureable Skills Gain. They were also comparing the quality jobs that clients get after they come out from agencies for the blind or combined agencies. In the agencies for the blind, the clients got better jobs with better benefits and higher pay. The emphasis was that these clients make about 20% more. This is one more reason why we have a separate independent Commission for the Blind in Nebraska.

With the WIOA local boards, we negotiated new rates for the portion of our contribution and we are now paying considerably less money, around 80 or 90% less, depending on the district. This was based on the fact that WIOA states that agencies should have a return of

investment. In other words, partners will pay a ratio according to the number of clients served at the AJC.

The Omaha office has had reduced office space since the end of August. Staff have worked very hard to get to this point and have maintained great communication so that we can work towards making this a positive work environment. It is a work in progress during the adjustment period, but things continue to move in the right direction.

## **II. Human Resources**

As you know, Cindy Zimmer's lost her battle against cancer. Steph Baldwin was teaching the Home Management class until she moved to Colorado last week. We followed the proper state re-employment work plan and the recall procedures and no former employees wanted to apply for the home management position. Thus, we advertised this position a few weeks ago and interviewed the candidates the week of October 21. We did not have a successful candidate so we will be re-advertising the position. We also followed the same procedure to hire an Orientation Counselor I, who will be working part time serving older blind in the Norfolk area. Interviews were held for this position on October 28. The position was offered to one of the candidates but she turned it down because she was accepted to a graduate school to obtain her graduate degree. The position will be re-opened.

Charli Saltzman was hired for the Braille and Communication instructor and she started her Center training on August 5. We reclassified the Rehab Tech position to one that reflects the support they provide to our staff. We interviewed applicants and Shelley Ritter was offered and accepted the position. Shelley started work on October 28. Adrienne Moody finished her Center training by the end of August and started her duties as an Orientation Counselor in Omaha. We reclassified the Rehab Tech position Adrienne vacated to an Accountant I to help the Business Office. We hired Brandy Harper for this position.

Commissioner Hansen took a moment to acknowledge Cindy Zimmer. NCBVI lost a long time employee who contributed a lot to the Commission over the years. Cindy made a deep impact on many people across Nebraska and across the Country. Commissioner Hansen stated that it is common for him to be talking to a blind person who has gone through Center training and have them bring up memories of Cindy. Cindy will be a difficult person to replace as she made a significant impact on many Nebraskans.

Commissioner Bell noted that Cindy is the only reason that he can cook anything as she taught him much.

Larry Oleson has taken on some more supportive roles in updating agency software and equipment. The three tech team employees continue to work supporting their districts, the Center and Administration.

Kat Carroll and Greg DeWall completed the four sessions of the NRLI Leadership seminar. NRLI gave Kat and Greg a scholarship for three of those sessions.

## **III. Field Services:**

The three districts have had several group home teaching sessions for people who are older blind. We are planning one of the group home teaching sessions to focus on individuals that live in Assisted Living. It will focus on skills that are important for that population. We have had several group home teachings for teenagers, especially those in the Pre-ETS group.

More schools are embracing counselor's coming into the school to meet and work on vocational counseling or technology. Lincoln staff continue to meet with the transition team from NCECBVI and this partnership continues to grow.

During the last week of July, we had Project Independence, for 12 blind students age 8 to 13. Due to program budget restrictions, this year PI was only for two days. NFB Mentoring program is taking place this weekend, November 1-3 and we have 27 students attending.

Our staff continues to meet with businesses and attend networking events and placement focus meetings across the state.

Some Omaha staff, along with the Nebraska Center for the Blind, attended the Omaha Council of the Blind picnic and visited with several new parents and participated in their activities on September 13.

We attended the Radio Talking Book Network 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on September 18.

#### **IV. Training Center**

The Center has eight students; three are senior blind clients. We also have one staff trainee. Two more clients are scheduled to start training before Thanksgiving.

#### **V. Nebraska Business Enterprise**

We are now providing full cafeteria service at USSTRATCOM cafeteria, Deterrence Diner. We have received a lot of positive feedback from employees at USSTRATCOM and it has been very rewarding. Commission Chair, Mark Bulger toured the cafeteria on October 29.

We completed the installation of vending machines in the 26 breakrooms at USSTRATCOM at the same time employees finished moving into the new USSTRATCOM building.

We have received a fully executed permit for the Veterans Administration (VA) in Lincoln, which is a part of the VA permit in Omaha. These two fully signed permits fulfill the arbitration requirements we filed against the VA.

Carol has been working with Coca-Cola on negotiations for new soda machines along I-80 at all of the rest areas. The transition of putting in new Coca-Cola machines along I-80 began during the week of October 7, 2019 and had an estimated completion date of November 1, 2019.

Carol Jenkins, Dave Robinson, and Erin Brandyberry toured the cafeterias at the YRTC's in Kearney and Geneva at the end of July and determined that these locations were not lucrative enough for us to take on.

Carol Jenkins has been working with Nebraska Risk Management to obtain a group general liability insurance policy for the NBE program. The NBE group general liability insurance policy took effect October 1, 2019, which lessened the cost of insurance for vendors by an average of 45%.

We submitted our bid to Department of Correctional Services for 14 vending locations last week. If NCBVI is awarded the bid, NCBVI will take over the sites on March 1, 2020.

Commissioner Newman noted that this past week they had a Friends of the Commission meeting. Kat Carroll participated in the meeting via phone. Commissioner Newman stated that Kat Carroll reported to them on some of the things that are happening at NCBVI. At one point they were talking about the senior blind who are attending Center training. In their Minutes, Chris Boone had reported that the senior blind are attending the Center for two to three months. Commissioner Newman asked why they are not attending for six to nine months similar to other clients.

Director Serván stated that there is simply more flexibility. When staff talk to clients about Center training they mention that it is a six to nine month program. However, sometimes the senior blind cannot make that long of a commitment. Therefore, we are working with the senior blind to meet their needs. In general, NCBVI still prefers the full Center training schedule.

Commissioner Newman noted that the Friends of the Commission are talking about doing some type of advertising such as a PSA about NCBVI. The Friends will be contacting NCBVI to discuss this further in the future.

Chair Bulger noted that Director Serván had indicated that Order of Selection (OOS) will not end until March 2020, but NCBVI currently has no waiting list. Chair Bulger asked is NCBVI has about the same number of clients that we have served in the past years with less staff. Director Serván noted that we do. Chair Bulger asked how NCBVI is able to do this. Director Serván noted that this is why he keeps giving credit to the supervisors and staff members. Staff have worked very hard and NCBVI has restructured some of the work flow. NCBVI only had a wait list for about four months. In addition, VR counselors were not laid off; OC counselors were laid off. Also, NCBVI was able to rehire some of the staff who were laid off.

Commissioner Rieken asked about Pre-ETS and the 15%. She asked how this will affect our programs such as Project Independence (PI), WAGES, and Winnerfest.

Director Serván explained the 15% requirement. Fifteen percent of NCBVI's overall budget, besides Older Blind, needs to be spent on Pre-Employment Transition services as defined by RSA. The definition states they must be students with a disability. In Nebraska, the agreement that we have with Voc. Rehab. states that the minimum age is 14. Therefore, PI is not included. WAGES is included, but the Pre-ETS requirement basically states that they have to be in direct training or field services. This means that some transportation and room and board is not included in the 15%.

Chair Bulger asked how much carryover money the agency currently has. Kat Carroll noted that NCBVI currently has a little over 3 million dollars in carryover funds. The combination

of the cuts the agency made along with the reallocation funds has really helped the agency out.

Director Serván noted that NCBVI will be spending a lot of money on the NBE program, sending staff to training and buying new equipment. This may make people wonder why we are not hiring more staff back if we have all this money. Director Serván stated that the extra money is only for this year; and therefore, we are only spending on items that are one-time costs. For funding of positions and offices, we need to make sure that we will have reoccurring funds. It is projected that NCBVI will only receive about \$200,000 in reallocation funds next year.

### Public Comment

Ryan Osentowski – Ryan stated that he wanted to give his condolences for the loss of Cindy Zimmer. Ryan noted that Cindy was his instructor in Home Ec when he went through NCBVI's Center training in 1993. Ryan thanked Cindy for all that he taught him.

### Break

A break was taken at 11:00 a.m.  
The meeting resumed at 11:18 a.m.

Chair Bulger acknowledged Commissioner Hansen and Commissioner Bell as their terms as a NCBVI commissioner are coming to an end. Commissioners Hansen and Bell will be greatly missed.

Chair Bulger noted that Commissioner Hansen has been invaluable to the Board and he truly cares for the blind of Nebraska. Commissioner Hansen served two full terms and part of another term. Commissioner Hansen has represented the NFB and their interests. He was very instrumental in leading the search for the new executive director.

Commissioner Bell has been on the Board for one full term. Commissioner Bell traveled across the state every time he came to a meeting which was a big commitment. He represented the interests of all blind people and especially those out in Western Nebraska.

A 12-inch chocolate chip cookie was presented to Commissioners Hansen and Bell for appreciation of their service. Both commissioners were also presented with a Certificate of Appreciation signed by Executive Director Carlos Serván. The certificates read as follows:

### **CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION**

**Presented in Gratitude to:**

**Mike Hansen**

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

**September 25, 2009 through December 31, 2019**

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION**

**Presented in Gratitude to:**

**Chad Bell**

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

**January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2019**

Director Serván thanked Commissioner Hansen and Commissioner Bell for their service as NCBVI executive director and as a blind consumer. As the executive director, he reflects upon their job in helping NCBVI be one of the best in the Nation.

Commissioner Hansen noted that he was thinking about the partial term that he filled out. At that time, some individuals made some negative comments to him. They inquired as to why the NFB had such a difficult time keeping a board member. Commissioner Hansen stated that he always had an easy answer and it was because the people who had filled that position before him had some wonderful opportunities as a blind person that kept them from fulfilling the term. It was not that they did not want to serve anymore, but life's opportunities prevented them from doing so. This happened to be a great benefit for NCBVI as both of the individuals became NCBVI employees. Commissioner Hansen stated that it has been a wonderful ten years and he will be happy to assist in the future.

Commissioner Bell noted that Commissioner Hansen was the Chair of the Board he made everyone's job very easy because he was an awesome leader and very instrumental. Commissioner Bell stated that he is proud to say that he is a product of NCBVI from 1995 when he went through Center training. When he had a chance to be a commissioner he felt it was a good opportunity to pay back. Commissioner Bell noted that he would love to serve another term; however, his family is his number one priority and they are all at a very busy point in their lives.

Commissioner Bulger thanked everyone for their comments.

### Newsline® Update by Kimberly Scherbarth

The format of this quarterly report has been changed in hopes that it would add some ease to its readability. Please feel free to offer feedback. This report contains data from August through October.

We had a table set up and had a training session at the NFB of Nebraska's State Convention. Nebraska's Visually Impaired Peer Support added an announcement to NFB Newsline® regarding the availability 2020 large print calendars which are currently for sale.

Usage	August	September	October
Number of Subscribers:	2047	2047	2052
New Subscribers:	1	0	3

Total Call Minutes:	11911	11176	11910
Total Online Accesses:	2957	3484	3394
Total Content Accesses:	4164	4179	4586
Content Access frequency:	10.72 minutes	10.34 minutes	9.73 minutes
Telephone Calls:	865	830	823
Average Call Length:	13.77	13.47	14.47
Percent Local Calls:	53.00	53.55	51.25
Online Web Sessions:	1095	1366	10.75
NFB Newslines® Mobile Sessions:	541	388	424
NFB NEwslines® Alexa Sessions:	3	8	30
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1065	1436	1512
E-mail Deliveries:	253	286	353
Nebraska Newspaper Accesses	3074	3066	3445
Local Weather/Emergency Alerts:	144	388	133
National Newspaper Accesses:	653	562	639
TV Listings:	445	443	383
Magazines	84	40	64

### Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

There are currently two separate CAP cases that are still pending.

One case involves a client who has been with the agency for a long time. The client feels that NCBVI needs to pay for additional college credits. It is NCBVI's position that we have already paid for more college credits than her degree required according to NCBVI policy and rules chapter 1.

The second case involves a client who wants NCBVI to pay for their equipment; however, the client has not yet signed the IPE.

### New Business

Discuss the question – why Commissioner's meetings are on the weekend and not during the week (Came up last meeting)

Chair Bulger stated that this agenda item came about because at the August Commission meeting it was asked why NCBVI doesn't have their Commission Board meetings during the week. At this time, Chair Bulger encouraged the Board members to think about his topic and come to the November meeting ready to discuss this. Chair Bulger asked the commissioners to share their thoughts on this topic.

Commissioner Bell stated that for a commissioner who is employed, having the meeting during the week would mean that they would need to take more time off their regular job to

attend. Personally, this could be a hardship for a Board member. Commissioner Bell noted that it could also be a hardship for someone who wanted to come to a meeting to take time off from their job during the week.

Commissioner Rieken stated with her job she is given so many days of professional leave, but there are other things in her profession that she needs to gain knowledge on as well. It would be difficult for her to use a professional day when the Board can meet on the weekends.

Commissioner Newman stated that if it would work better for businesses for the Board meetings to be held during the week it may make sense. Otherwise, he does not see a benefit to holding the meetings during the week.

Commissioner Hansen noted that in talking with the individual who brought the topic up at the August meeting, it was partially in regards to the number of the public that attend the meetings. At many meetings there are very few from the public who attend. It was thought that NCBVI staff may attend if the meetings were during the week. For staff who are required to attend the meetings it can be difficult for them to flex off time during the week. Commissioner Hansen stated that he does like the idea of making the Board accessible to staff. Over the years, the Board has also had conversations about where they should meet. The Board has rotated the meeting location all across the state to make it accessible to the public. However, the public was not coming to the meetings and the Commission was not being asked to come somewhere specific. At that point, it was decided to rotate the meeting to where NCBVI has offices to be accessible to the staff. In the last two years, NCBVI began making use of holding meetings via video conference. However, the Public Meeting law has some specific requirements that need to be followed and it is very specific about the number of meetings that can be held via video conference per year. Commissioner Hansen encouraged the ACB and the NFB to work together with State Government to change some of the requirements that Commissions and Boards need to follow when having meetings. If the requirements for video conferencing are expanded it makes more venues available for the public to attend the meetings all year long. Video conferencing also makes it easier for Commission Board members to attend meetings. It also saves the State money by not having to pay for hotels and mileage.

Chair Bulger noted that NCBVI is a consumer driven organization. There are times when many consumers attend meetings and there are times when they do not. When the public does not attend it probably means that everything is going okay, which is good. The other thing that NCBVI values is having blind people work. Chair Bulger stated that he supports keeping the meetings on Saturdays. Chair Bulger suggested that staff who have to work during the Saturday meetings should try to take some flex or comp time to compensate for that.

Commissioner Hansen suggested that they Board hold the Summer 2020 meeting during the week. This topic will be carried over to the next agenda item.

Discuss and set dates and focus topics for next year (Two new Commissioners start in January; might keep this open)

Chair Bulger noted that typically the Board meets in Lincoln in February because of Nebraska weather. Chair Bulger asked if all commissioners were okay with scheduling the

February 1, 2020 meeting in Lincoln. All commissioners agreed. This meeting will be held at the NCBVI office site.

The commissioners tentatively picked the dates and locations for the remainder of the 2020 meetings leaving it open to the input of new commissioners coming on board in 2020.

Saturday, February 1, 2020; Lincoln. Focus Topic: NFB Mentoring Program

Saturday, May 2, 2020; Kearney. Focus Topic: Adjusting to not having an office location and Executive Director annual evaluation

Friday, July 31, 2020; Lincoln (at a location downtown if possible). Focus Topic: To be determined

Saturday, November 7, 2020; Omaha. Focus Topic: To be determined

Commissioner Hansen asked in the Commission Board would be looking into having a Retreat with the new commission members sometime during the first quarter of 2020.

The commissioners all noted that the Retreat they attended when coming on board as a new commissioner was very helpful for them.

This will be an agenda item for the February 2020 Commission Board meeting when the two new commissioners are present. Chair Hansen noted that the Retreat is information and training only; no official NCBVI business may be conducted.

#### Public Comment

There was no public comment.

#### Typical Final Announcements

Chair Bulger thanked everyone for coming to today's meeting and he again thanked Commissioners Hansen and Bell for their service as a NCBVI Commissioner.

After the adjournment, there will be a tour of the Omaha NCBVI offices.

#### Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the February 1, 2020 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at [ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov](mailto:ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov).

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Mark Bulger, Chairperson  
NCBVI Board of Commissioners

## Staff Reports

### Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Charli Saltzman accepted a position as the Braille and Communications instructor in the Center. We have hired Shelley Ritter to replace her. Shelley will start on Oct. 28. We are currently interviewing for a part time Orientation Counselor in the Norfolk area. They will focus on serving people who are older blind.

We have had several groups for people who are older blind. We are planning one of the Group Home teaching sessions to focus on individuals that live in Assisted Living. It will focus on skills that are important for that population. We have had several group home teachings for teenagers.

We had three clients get jobs in production at Universal Pure. We had two clients get jobs as Customer Service Reps. One client got a job in food service and another as a Wealth Manager.

### Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

We welcomed Adrienne Moody to the Omaha Office at the end of August. She is so excited to be in the field and has hit the ground running. Adrienne has shadowed staff as they meet with new referrals, attends Individual Education Plan meetings and meetings with VR clients. She has been meeting with community agencies to learn about their services and how we work in partnership, Weigel Williamson, Parent Training and Information Center, Monroe Meyer to name a few.

With the new school year upon us, there are a lot of meetings for Individual Education Plans. We have our group teaching sessions planned for when students are out of school or have early dismissal. Otherwise, their counselors are meeting with them individually. Some schools are embracing counselor's coming into the school to meet and work on vocational counseling or technology.

Kelly and Adrienne attended the ESU#3 open house for Special Ed Directors and Parents on September 23.

Tim continues to attend placement related meetings at Heartland Workforce Solutions for EmployOma and he attends on-site interviews and job fairs there as well.

We continue to work with the blind licensee at Offutt AFB.

Larry and the rest of the Technology Specialist have been providing some hands on training to our new Communications Instructor Charli Saltzman while she is in training. Larry has taken on some more supportive roles in updating agency software and equipment. He and the tech team work to support their districts, the Center and Administration.

Some Omaha staff, along with the Nebraska Center for the Blind, attended the Omaha Council of the Blind picnic and visited with several new parents and participated in their activities on September 13.

We attended the Radio Talking Book Network 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on September 18. Kim attended the Vision Resource Coalition where they are starting to look at the Spring Resource Fair and look at best methods to submit referrals to one another. Kim continues to facilitate Job Club. Kim and other VR counselors are in the community at job fairs and other employment related activities.

We also have scheduled group teachings for older blind individuals.

We celebrated Staff Appreciation Day on September 27. I prepared lunch for the Omaha staff and we spent some time together. I took the opportunity to recognizing staff for all their hard work and dedication as their supervisor; but also on behalf of all the Leadership Team. It is as a team we accomplish so much.

Kathy and I attended a luncheon on October 15 sponsored by the Northwest Omaha Rotary. The Rotarian's honored Nebraska Medicine for their work with us. They referred two employees to us that were in job jeopardy. The Rotary Club requested nominations for small and large businesses to spotlight them during Disabilities Awareness month. They remarked at the luncheon that the employees went from job jeopardy to being top performers in their departments.

#### North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

##### Networking:

Fritz attends monthly interagency meetings in North Platte and he was the speaker at one of these meeting to provide information about NCBVI. Angie provided a Fall Prevention workshop in Scottsbluff, spoke at an OIB peer support group in Gering, provided a staff in-service at Hay Springs Manor, and had a booth at a Health Fair in Scottsbluff. Angie also met with VR local director to discuss pre-ets coordination with schools. Because of all of this, Angie attended transition planning meetings at the schools in Bridgeport, Garden County, Bayard, and Morrill. Cristal did employer outreach with Buckle Corporate and CHI Good Samaritan Hospital-Nutrition Services. Cristal also participated in a disability fair and did outreach to over 100 participants, participated in Disability Awareness Day at CHI St. Francis with GI Project Search, and continues to be active in Project Search sites in Kearney, Hastings, and Grand Island. Cristal, Angie, and Erin are active participants in WIOA partner meetings in their areas. Jan has worked with a TVI and a Para educator on new braille technology and techniques, as well as worked with the VA's Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator to acquire assistive technology for consumers. Deanna provided an in-service at Kearney Manor, Autumn Village, and Good Samaritan Hastings. She also provided a Fall Prevention class in Hastings, and at Evergreen Assisted Living in O'Neil, NE. Deanna also had a booth at a health fair for seniors in Grand Island. Erin presented to three staff members at McCook High School on blindness alternatives in the class of industrial technology. Erin completed employer outreach with Taco John's, Bomgaar's, Linden Court, and Great Plains Hospital. Erin also started participating in a OIB Regional phone call with OIB program managers from states in this region.

### Projects:

All staff coordinated and participated in an OIB group home teaching that was held October 15-17 in North Platte. It was a great success with six clients in attendance. We held two Pre-ETS group teachings, one located in Grand Island and one located in North Platte. We had 19 students in attendance and we focused the topic on budgeting. Fritz coordinated a day-long informational interview/job shadow for a client with a blind manager and on-air personality of a radio station who built the radio station from the ground up by himself. Jan has worked with the district to correct issues with computers and cell phones that have been encountered since working remotely. Jan assisted with training activities for Charli Saltzman and has worked with the NBE program to create more easily accessible P&L statements for our vendors. Erin has assisted the NBE with making the arrangements with the three vendors who operate sites along the interstate with the replacement of NCBVI's soda machines with Coke machines. Erin participated in a Zoom call hosted by the Department of Education on efforts to improve their transition services. Erin also participated in the Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board Meeting.

### Training:

Jan, Cristal and Fritz attended a training on Keys to Successful Coaching. Deanna attended an Elder Justice training at CCC. Erin attended the OIB program manager's conference in Minneapolis and gained great information to improve our OIB program.

### Client Outcomes:

Cristal had one client graduate from Center Training, and both Cristal and Angie each had a client start Center Training. Cristal has one client participating in Project Search this year, and has Pre-ETS clients completing Work-Based Learning Experiences at the Kearney Animal Shelter and CHI St. Francis. Cristal had one Pre-ETS student finish a work-based learning experience at a restaurant, which resulted in part-time employment for that high school student. Cristal also had two clients gain employment, at UNK and as a CNA. Fritz had a client gain employment at a Special Education Para Professional. Erin provided job coaching for a client at an OJT in the dietary department of a nursing home and the client gained employment at the end of the OJT. Erin also had one client start a work-based learning experience at Taco John's.

### Center Activity Report – Greg DeWall

Currently: 8 Students

5 students are VR

3 Students are Older Blind

Charli Saltzman is the current staff trainee. She will complete her training the first week of December.

5 Three Day Stays

1 Student had a Mini Meal

There were 4 commencement meals

Tours: 5 tours with agency consumers, 1 Tour with NCBVI's legislative fiscal analyst, 3 Tours with State Senator offices.

Observations: No observations this quarter.

Volunteer Activities: Students of the Center participated in cleaning play equipment at the Lincoln Children's Museum.

Student Requested Activities: Center students were scheduled to go to the Nebraska NFB State convention. Due to the agenda not being released in time for NCBVI's Director to approve this activity, Center students did not attend the NFBN convention.

Guest Speakers: Erica Sousak, from Department of Labor, has come monthly. She has discussed interviewing techniques. For one activity, multiple guests from Department of Labor attended the seminar in order to give each of the students one-on-one attention. The NFB affiliate president, Amy Buresh, met with the students to discuss the NFB and the NFBN State convention.

Center Staff: The Center's travel instructor, Jeff Altman, has been implementing new assignments for his students, including a final route based on a day of running errands. Instructors are regularly working on projects to improve their classes. Center students are very fortunate to have Steph Baldwin step in as home-management instructor. Although Steph is leaving at the end of October, she is working hard to make sure new and efficient systems are in place for the new upcoming Home-Management instructor. Our newly acquired Communications instructor Charli Saltzman is working on developing new curriculums as she works hard to complete her staff training.

Center Supervisor: Recently I attended the 4th NRLI seminar in San Diego. This last of four seminars focused on integration of organizational systems and solving cultural issues within the agency. I am looking forward to implementing some of the new ideas involving improving culture and team building as NCBVI distances ourselves from the budget cuts and layoffs. Since the financial crisis less than a year ago, I have tried to be mindful of spending and am always entertaining new ideas on where to help the Center save money while still providing quality services to blind Nebraskans. We are continuing to look to make changes in how purchases of supplies are made in home-management. These changes will allow us to save money by purchasing items in bulk, and creating a more consistent lesson plan for students. I am eager to hire a permanent Home-management instructor. Once we are fully staffed the students will benefit from having a regular instructor and more continuity.

Additional Notes: This is the first quarter we have opened the apartments and the Center to Older Blind individuals in Nebraska. As of now, we have 3 OIB students participating in training and making great progress.

The Center currently has eight 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 looking forward to celebrating the completion of one of our senior students in November, and welcoming two more before Thanksgiving.

The total number of students attending the Center does not include staff trainees because they do not stay in the Center Apartments. We have ten Center apartments and so ten 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.

## Transition Activity Report – Shane Buresh

Since I last reported to you and just before your last quarterly meeting, we held another successful Project Independence at the end of July. We had twelve youth between ages 8 and 13 in attendance, four of whom were new. Our theme was “Independence Is Epic”. Due to budgetary constraints the program was shortened by half this year, but it remained “EPIC”. Beyond the customary sleep shade training; we had a visit by a guide dog user, played beeping kickball and human foosball, made tie dye t-shirts, ran our own taco shop business and served lunch to the parents, and much more.

In addition, this quarter the NFB Career Mentoring Program continues to inspire growth with monthly calls for both mentors and mentees. As of this writing, there are twelve mentees and seven mentors enrolled in the program. Just across town from your meeting in Omaha and on the same weekend, the program will be once again holding a retreat with the mentors and mentees in attendance, along with a number of additional NCBVI Pre-Ets students who might have otherwise attended a Winnerfest program. Among other activities, students will be working on work based learning projects, with such businesses as a blind vendor, a blind mechanic, a blind property manager and much more. I will have more to report on this during my next offering after this event has concluded.

In terms of outreach and collaboration this quarter, myself and other commission staff have attended transition events and we are continuing to further are relationship building with NCECBVI. Lincoln District staff are making regular visits to student worksites and classrooms and we have been invited to present at parent teacher conferences. During the next quarter, NCECBVI is once again planning to make a trip to spend a day in the Center with several of their Pre-Ets aged students. My next report will have updates on many of these future events which should have happened by then. Finally, supervisors, Carol Jenkins and I along with several administrative staff from NCECBVI are continuing the series of meetings begun in the spring of 2018. While the meeting was canceled in September due to some unforeseen circumstances on NCECBVI’s end, the collaborations above are keeping us in touch and we will get a schedule established this next quarter.

Although not necessarily a new development in most cases, it should be noted that each of the districts have begun group sessions in the area of Pre-Ets. Students ages 14 to 21 are gathered together at a NCBVI office or in school settings and provided materials and engaging programming to explore the areas of; job exploration, college preparation, work readiness skill development, work based learning opportunities and self-advocacy skill acquisition.

In terms of new developing relationships over the next quarter and up coming year, we have some exciting programming coming with third party vendors such as, “Skys The Limit”, ran by David De Notaris, who will be providing a College Workshop and an Employment Seminar for Pre-Ets students.

I will conclude this quarterly report by saying that you can see that there are many moving parts and projects in play, even if we have transitioned away from the busy summer time schedule. Until next quarter when you hear from me again, know that we are hard at work showing the blind students in Nebraska that their future can be bright.

## Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Carol Jenkins

### Vending Sites Update

#### Nebraska Department of Corrections

The Nebraska Department of Corrections has posted the Request for Proposal (RFP) for 14 vending locations across Nebraska. Due to revisions of the RFP schedule of events, bids are now due on November 1, 2019 at 2 PM. If NCBVI is awarded the bid, NCBVI will take over the sites on March 1, 2020.

#### Nebraska State Building Division

NCBVI is still in permit negotiations with the Nebraska State Building Division. Carol Jenkins has been working with Nebraska Risk Management to obtain a group general liability insurance policy for the NBE program. The NBE group general liability insurance policy took effect October 1, 2019, which lessened the cost of insurance for vendors. Once the permit has been fully executed, Carol will set up a training for relevant NCBVI staff, NBE Staff, and licensees who will be responsible for carrying out the permit.

### Offutt

The new Deterrence cafeteria in the US STRATCOM building has had glowing reviews and has been off to a wonderful start! Deterrence was fully operational by November 1, 2019. The vending machines were slowly installed as employees moved into the new US STRATCOM building. All vending machines were installed by November 1, 2019 after all US STRATCOM employees were moved in.

### Other Potential Vending Site Expansions

NCBVI determined that the existing cafeterias at the YRTC's in Kearney and Geneva as well as the Concessions at the Nebraska State Surplus Auctions to not be profitable enough endeavors for the NBE Program. Thus, NCBVI declined when given the first priority of refusal.

### Licensees Update

#### Vending Site Complaints

The categories of complaints that have come in to NCBVI this quarter have been as follows: vendors not coming often enough to stock machines, having expired products in machines, and not having vending sites clean and orderly. This is a reminder 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 Notes

#### Policies and Procedures

Carol is still working with Nebraska Risk Management to include our vendors under NCBVI's current Worker's Compensation policy, which will be a benefit to our vendors as well as lessen costs for vendors. Carol is also working with the NBE Licensee Committee Chairperson to amend the NBE Operator's Agreement to include language regarding ensuring drivers used for NBE purposes have the minimum required automobile insurance in Nebraska. Once the NBE Licensee Committee agrees and passes the proposed amendments, the Operator Agreement will then be submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for approval.

### DOT Interstate Project

Carol has been working with Coca-Cola on negotiations for new soda machines along I-80 at all of the rest areas. The transition of putting in new Coca-Cola machines along I-80 began during the week of October 7, 2019 and had an estimated completion date of November 1, 2019.

### Looking Ahead

NCBVI has no plans to do any major expansions for the NBE Program at this time. However, NCBVI will continue to work on previously agreed to projects for the NBE Program.

### Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Looking for additional ways to save the agency money without harming client services
- Adjusted to the Reduction in Force policy
- Completed the last space reduction from the Budget Cuts, with the remodeling of the Omaha office reducing the size of the space.
- Major reorganization of Business Office, continuing training a new Accountant I (Michelle Rogers), and hiring and training of an Accounting Clerk I (Brandy Harper). Continue planning for how to maximize efficiency and internal controls with only Michelle, Brandy and I involved. This is a major challenge and still a work in progress.
- Attended the final week of NRLI Training in September in San Diego
- Redesigned agency Business Units to simplify and eliminate unnecessary complications, going from around 500 Business Units per year to 15.
- Continue work on procurement and installation for US STRATCOM cafeteria and vending equipment.
- Conversion of our phone system from Windstream to Allo.
- 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.

Kathy Stephens –

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2019 deadline.

Worked on cleaning up some of the fixed asset listings in E1 for the Nebraska Business Enterprise program.

Working on staff CVRCB Certificate renewals so they do not expire.

Registrations and travel arrangements for some staff conferences.

Participated in the on-site walk through of the Lincoln Correctional facilities and assisting in putting together the Request for Proposal (RFP).

Working on scheduling tours of the Nebraska Center for the Blind for State Senators.