

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting
Saturday, November 4, 2017
Omaha State Office Building, 1313 Farnam Street, Room 226
Omaha, Nebraska

Minutes

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings, other logistics.

Mike Hansen, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

Commissioners present: Mike Hansen, Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Mark Bulger, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City; Chad Bell, Alliance.

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director Client Services, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-HR, Lincoln; Bill Brown, Business Manager, Lincoln; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor.

Public Present: Jim Jirak, Omaha; Crystal Platt, Omaha; Ryan Osentowski, Omaha.

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. Lunch will not be served as the meeting is scheduled to adjourn at 12:35 p.m.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting 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 Newline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACBN, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the July 29th and August 14th Public Meeting Minutes.

Commissioner Bulger moved to approve the Minutes of the July 29, 2017 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Rieken moved to approve the Minutes of the August 14, 2017 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Changes in the Rehab Act from WIOA.

Director Serván noted that one of the major changes with WIOA was that NCBVI needs to spend 15% of our budget on Pre-ETS services. NCBVI has always provided services to that population, but RSA was putting restrictions on what could be counted towards Pre-ETS services. WIOA also places more emphasis on working with local workforce development Boards.

Bob Deaton noted that WIOA (Workforce Investment Opportunity Act replaces WIA (Workforce Investment Act) of 1998. Bob noted that WIOA is still evolving. With WIOA, NCBVI has been working in partnership with several agencies as far as the development of a unified State Plan. NCBVI's part of the plan is called the VR portion of that plan. There are many areas in which agencies are to be working together as it relates to serving clients in the workforce system. The document Bob put together for this Focus Topic is a side-by-side comparison of WIA and WIOA.

Major Changes Wrought by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Before WIOA: "Competitive employment" and "integrated setting" are defined separately in the Rehabilitation Act.

WIOA: Definitions for "competitive employment" and "integrated setting" are combined into one definition for "competitive integrated employment."

Operational Changes: This change will be incorporated into the Definitions section of rules and regulations for NCBVI. Other definitions in NCBVI rule will also be updated to be consistent with WIOA as well.

Before WIOA: State rehabilitation agencies were supposed to use trial work experiences in making a determination that applicants were unable to benefit from an employment outcome from VR services due to the severity of the individual's disability. An exception for the use of trial work experiences was allowed "...under limited circumstances when an individual cannot take advantage of those experiences."

WIOA: The exception from requiring the use of trial work experiences is removed from the statute.

Operational Changes: NCBVI has not made it a practice to determine applicants ineligible for VR services because of a determination that the individual is too disabled to benefit from services. This change in WIOA has not resulted in any operational changes for NCBVI. It is noted, however, that NCBVI is currently experiencing an increase in the number of referrals with the most significant disabilities and, where appropriate, trial work experiences may be used more often in the determination of an individual's work capacities.

Before WIOA: "Homemaker" and "unpaid family worker" were regarded as acceptable employment outcomes.

WIOA: "Homemaker" and "unpaid family worker" are no longer regarded as acceptable employment outcomes.

Operational changes: No real operational change. Historically, NCBVI closed relatively few clients as homemakers or unpaid family workers

Distinct Services for Youth

Before WIOA: Transition services were not a mandatory part of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

WIOA: IPE must include specific transition services if the eligible individual is a student with a disability. WIOA federal regulations also require that transition services be coordinated with the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Operational Changes: All IPEs involving students with a disability include specific transition services needed to achieve the employment goal. Closer working relationships are being developed with secondary schools to ensure a smoother transition from high school consistent with IEPs.

Before WIOA: "Student with a disability" and "youth with a disability" were not defined in the Rehabilitation Act.

WIOA: "Student with a disability" between the ages of 16 through 21 who is enrolled in an educational program, including a post-secondary or other recognized education program. "Youth with a disability" between the ages of 14 through 24. Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) must be provided only to students with disabilities.

Operational Changes: In Nebraska, "student with a disability" is defined as being between the ages of 14-21.

Before WIOA: the Rehabilitation Act included no reference to pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre—ETS).

WIOA: Pre-ETS is a new term under WIOA. Pre-ETS include the following five required activities:

Job exploration counseling,

Work-based learning opportunities,

Counseling on post-secondary educational opportunities,

Workplace readiness training,

Instruction in self-advocacy.

WIOA federal regulations require that 15% of Title I Basic Support funds be used in the provision of Pre-ETS statewide to all students with disabilities in need of such services, including those who are eligible or potentially eligible for NCBVI services; 50% of Title VI Part B funds for Supported Employment must be used in the provision of Pre-ETS.

After provision of the five required Pre-ETS activities have been assured, funds may be expended on an additional nine authorized activities. Federal regulations also specifies that Pre-ETS does not include services such as tuition or other costs of attending post-secondary educational institutions, job coaching, training, travel expenses, or uniforms.

Operational Changes: NCBVI has a long history of providing services to blind and visually impaired children and youth. This has made it easier for NCBVI to increase expenditures for the five core activities required by WIOA, more than matching the mandated 15% set-aside. So far, all blind and visually impaired students between 14 and 21 years of age have been accepted for NCBVI services, although there may be some who may be found potentially eligible who do not apply for NCBVI services. In that case, Pre-ETS would be available to them. A Plan with a timeline for implementing Pre-ETS has been submitted to RSA.

Before WIOA: Applicants and eligible individuals have individual rights and due process rights.

WIOA: Federal regulations specifically include students with disability and youth with disabilities as included under this provision.

Operational Changes: No real operational change.

Before WIOA: Pre-ETS not part of Rehabilitation Act prior to WIOA.

WIOA: Pre-ETS funds cannot be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing Pre-ETS; however, the set-aside for Pre-ETS can be used for staff-related costs including salaries, fringe benefits, and travel expenses incurred while providing Pre-ETS.

Operational Changes: NCBVI is tracking staff-related costs as allowed by WIOA and charging expenses to the 15% set-aside (50% in the case of supported employment services).

Before WIOA: The Rehabilitation Act had no section dedicated to transition services.

WIOA: Each local office of a vocational rehabilitation agency must: (1) attend Individual Education Program meetings for students with disabilities when invited, (2) work with local workforce development boards, One-Stop centers, and employers to develop work opportunities for students with disabilities, (3) work with schools, to coordinate and guarantee the provision of pre-employment transitions services, and (4) attend person-centered planning meetings for individuals receiving services under Title 19 of Social Security Act, when invited.

Operational Changes: NCBVI has, as a matter of course, been attending IEP meetings and ISP meetings (Title XIX meetings for persons with developmental disabilities) whenever we have been invited. NCBVI has been meeting with WIOA core partners over the past two and a half years to develop a combined State Plan and closer working relationships. Focus now is on developing an accessible common intake process.

NCBVI is also a member of the WIOA Partner Council comprised of stakeholders in the workforce development system. We just concluded memorandums of understanding with the three local workforce boards in Nebraska and finish negotiating the annual fee agreements with each local area. The workforce development system is very much a work in progress. Shane Buresh, NCBVI Transition Coordinator, and other NCBVI counselors have been reaching out to educational institutions to foster greater cooperation in the provision of Pre-ETS to students with disabilities.

Supported Employment

Before WIOA: Supported employment means competitive work in integrated work settings, or employment in integrated work settings in which individuals are working towards competitive work, consistent with the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual, for individuals with the most significant disabilities - (1) for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred or has been interrupted or intermitted as a result of a significant disability; and (2) who, because of the nature of their disability need intensive supported employment services for the period, and any extensions, and extended services after the transition in order to perform such services.

WIOA: While individuals may continue working in an integrated subminimum wage setting towards competitive integrated employment, they may do so only on a short-term basis. Also, "customized employment" a new term defined in WIOA, is now included in the definition of supported employment. Federal regulations define continuation in an integrated, subminimum status on a short-term basis as 6 months with an allowance for an extension not to exceed 12 months.

Operational Changes: NCBVI uses a milestone model for contracting providers of supported employment services. This model was pioneered by Nebraska VR. This provides incentive payments to the supported employment provider at the time contracted services are initiated, completion of a job search and the start of

employment, job coaching and stabilization of on-the-job support (not less than 30 days following the start of employment), and maintenance of ongoing support at the level of stabilization (not less than 60 days following job stabilization). The provision of supported employment services while the individual is still in a subminimum wage status is expected to be a fairly rare event. The same fee schedule is used for individuals receiving “customized employment services” with the exception that the provider is also paid for conducting a “discovery” profile of the individual.

Before WIOA: The delivery of supported employment services to an individual with the most significant disability was not to exceed 18 months, unless special circumstances existed.

WIOA: Persons with the most significant disabilities may receive supported employment services for up to 24 months; however, this may be extended if circumstances warrant.

Operational Changes: Using the milestone model, it is conceivable that a case may be closed as early as 90 days following the start of employment if the individual’s job performance has stabilized for at least 60 days after the first month of employment. Very few cases are expected to require ongoing support from NCBVI for more than a year following the start of employment.

Subminimum Wage

Before WIOA: There were no provisions pertaining Subminimum wages earned by individuals aged 24 and younger.

WIOA: Payment of subminimum wages to individuals aged 24 or younger is prohibited unless the individual is already employed at subminimum wage or documentation from the vocational rehabilitation agency shows that the individual has received Pre-ETS services, career counseling, and information and referral designed to enable the individual to obtain competitive integrated employment. Also, the individual must have either (1) have applied for and been found ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services, or (2) is working towards an employment outcome in an IPE and received appropriate support and services, including supported employment services, for a reasonable period of time without success resulting in case closure and the individual has been provided career counseling and information and referral to federal, state, and local programs to help the individual discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment, and the counseling and information was not for employment at subminimum wage. Federal regulations establish the minimum information necessary to document the required activities or refusal to participate in the activities and the time frame for providing such information to the individual.

Operational Changes: NCBVI received its first referral of an individual in a subminimum wage status back in June. Since then, there have been several more. At the time of this writing, most referrals are in the career counseling and information and referral (ccir) phase. A few have moved into applicant status for supported employment services.

Before WIOA: Subminimum wage regardless of age - no provision

WIOA: Effective July 22, 2016, an employer may not continue to employ an individual, regardless of age, in a subminimum wage placement, unless, twice during the first year of placement and annually thereafter: (1) the vocational rehabilitation agency provides career counseling and information and referrals (CCIR) that offer employment related services and supports; and (2) the employer informs the individual of self-advocacy, self-determination, and peer mentoring training opportunities available in the local

community. Federal regulations state that CCIR for those hired in subminimum wage positions on or after July 22, 2016, must be provided at six months and then annually thereafter, and for those employed prior to July 22, 2016, once by July 22, 2017, and annually thereafter. The intervals for ccir are calculated based upon when the individual becomes known to the vocational rehabilitation agency.

Operational Changes: NCBVI will track all blind and visually impaired individuals currently in a subminimum wage status to ensure that CCIR services are provided so long as they remain in that status.

Before WIOA: Authorization to review subminimum wage documentation - no provision.

WIOA: Certified employer shall be subject to review of the required individual documentation by a representative working directly for the vocational rehabilitation or the United States Department of Labor at such a time and in such a manner as may be necessary to fulfill the intent of the law. Federal regulations recommend, but do not require, the vocational rehabilitation agency to report deficiencies noted in the documentation to the United States Department of Labor.

Operational changes: NCBVI has not yet reviewed documentation of any individuals currently in a subminimum wage status.

One-Stop Centers

Before WIOA: Required memorandums of understanding between local boards and one-stop operators must include provisions on: (1) services to be provided, (2) funding sources and mechanisms, (3) methods of referral between one-stop operator and partners, and duration of the memorandum of understanding.

WIOA: Required memorandums of understanding must now also include the methods to ensure that the needs of the individual are addressed and limit the duration of the memorandum of understanding to a maximum three years. The funding provision is expanded to require discussion of how funding through cash and in-kind contributions will be used and how infrastructure costs will be funded. Federal regulations state that the information in a required memorandum of understanding includes descriptions of: (1) services to be delivered through the one-stop including coordination and delivery; (2) funding the costs of services, including the cost of infrastructure, shared services and operating costs; (3) methods for referring between the one-stop operators and partners for appropriate services and activities; (4) methods to ensure that the needs of workers, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, are addressed in providing access to services, including technology and material services.

Operational changes: NCBVI has entered into memorandums of understanding with the three local boards across Nebraska. Annual fee schedules were also negotiated.

Before WIOA: The law simply provided that if a one-stop delivery system had been established prior to 1998, the Governor could decide to certify.

WIOA: The requirements of a one-stop delivery system include: (1) a one-stop in each local area with access to the six core programs; (2) the services must be provided at least one physical center in each local area and may make the services available through a network of affiliated sites or through a network of eligible one-stop partners; (3) collocation of employment service offices under Wagner-Peyser Act; and (4) should have a common system identifier, such as logo or phrase. Federal regulations state that while a Title I staff person must be physically present at the one-stop, access to the other partner programs and services include making available a direct linkage through technology to program staff that can provide meaningful information and services.

Providing a phone number or website would be considered serving an individual, as long as more involved access was available to that customer if desired.

Operational changes: The development of the workforce development system as envisioned by WIOA is still under way, and NCBVI is involved at all levels of discussion and negotiations. Connie Daly, the Lincoln District Supervisor was appointed to be on the Lincoln WIOA Board; I nominated Erin Brandyberry, North Platte District Supervisor to be on the Greater Nebraska WIOA Board and; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor is also working on getting appointed on the Omaha WIOA Board.

Funding

Before WIOA: No provisions for certified expenditures for match.

WIOA: While WIOA contains no provisions for certified expenditures for match, federal regulations state that certified match excludes administrative, operating, and indirect costs regarding third-party cooperative arrangements for both vocational rehabilitation and supported employment. Only costs directly spent providing services under the arrangements are allowable.

Operational changes: No operational changes as NCBVI is not in need for extra match.

Performance Accountability System

Before WIOA: The statutorily required standards and performance indicators for the vocational rehabilitation program were established and published in the federal implementing regulations

WIOA: Establishes six new common performance standards for all core programs, including the (1) and (2) percentage of participants employed during second and fourth quarters after program exit; (3) median earnings of participants during second quarter after exit; (4) percentage of participants who obtained diplomas or credentials during the program or within one year after exit; (5) percentage of participants achieving measurable skill gains or progress towards credentials or employment; and (6) effectiveness in serving employers. The regulations do not identify the measure for the effectiveness in serving employers but this measure is being piloted to determine which method or methods of determining effectiveness will be in the final performance measure.

Operational changes: NCBVI has been providing data as required for determining how well performance standards are being met. Results of data analysis are expected sometime in 2018.

Independent Living Services

Before WIOA: Title VII, Part B funds were provided to designated state unit(s) for the provision of independent living services to persons with disabilities who did not have an employment goal. How funds were to be used was described in a 3-year State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) signed by the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the designated state unit(s).

WIOA: The administration of Title VII Part B funds shifted to a designated state unit chosen by SILC. State vocational rehabilitation agencies were no longer mandated as designated state units.

Operational changes: In Nebraska, Nebraska VR and NCBVI were identified as designated state units before WIOA. Monroe-Meyer became the designated state unit towards the end of 2015. Nebraska VR and NCBVI no longer receive Title VII Part B funds for independent living services and no longer sign off on the SPIL. NCBVI

requested the Unicameral and received approval for \$40,000 annually for independent living services in the last biennium budget request to replace Title VII Part B funds.

New NCBVI Programs or Adaptations to Existing Programs as a Result of WIOA

As a result of the WIOA legislation passed in 2014, NCBVI has taken the specific emphasis through required activities and funding set aside in what the law calls Pre Employment Transition Services, Pre-ETS, as an opportunity to create new or enhance previous programming. This new legislation urges agencies to create the kinds of programming initiatives that NCBVI has long considered standard best-practice transition programming, so in many cases we utilized the new focus to take programs to a higher level. As the rules became final and as RSA continues to redefine what is and what is not allowable spending under the Pre-ETS provision, we continue to evolve and/or tweak our innovations likewise. Below then is a brief description of the new or modified programs that we have tried since the Pre-ETS provision.

Reboot Camp

In an effort to strengthen our relationship with parents and teachers, something the WIOA legislation asks us to do, and to provide the most accessible and contemporary technology training needed by blind and visually impaired transitioning youth, NCBVI conceived and conducted a workshop we entitled “reboot Camp”. This workshop was completed in a retreat format at a La Vista Hotel and was designed to instruct students in the use and benefits of the iPad and voiceover technology. 37 youth received iPad Pros, a bundle of productivity applications, and a digital curriculum to help the learning to continue on into the future. Also to keep the learning going, we included teachers and parents, so that those in the student’s support system also had the information their youth received and could help learning take on a greater dimension after the program concluded. This aspect of the reboot Camp has been praised by the education professionals who often are unable to keep abreast of technology developments and who are often not able to assist students with technology they have learned from NCBVI at programs since they were not in attendance.

There were two full days of direct instruction for all and evening breakout sessions designed specifically for students and parents to meet and discuss their own specific accommodation issues. Individuals from the Omaha Apple store were also in attendance as luncheon speakers, which is a very unique event as Apple rarely allows for their instructors to attend other groups training sessions. In conclusion more than 75 persons who attended for one reason or another received technology instruction and exposure to all of the five required Pre-ETS emphasis areas and NCBVI enhanced relationships with the business community and teachers and parents. Programming from the International School of Protocol

WIOA also encourages/requires that NCBVI try to leverage expertise from third party providers to deliver services and/or provide instruction in the five required activities. Throughout this set of descriptions several of these partnerships will be highlighted, but one partner has stood out above the others and has joined us in several different programming capacities, which is that of the “International School of Protocol”.

Whether joining us during existing programs such as, Winner fest and WAGES with their strength series workshops, or through providing their original stand alone workshop entitled “Blind and Socially Savvy”, these programs have taken our instruction in leadership, work readiness skills, self-advocacy and college preparatory work to a whole new level.

Blind and Socially Savvy

In an effort to prepare our Pre-ETS youth to be better self-advocates, improve their social and soft skills and gain confidence beyond their average sighted counterparts to help them put their best foot forward in employment, school and everyday life settings, NCBVI has twice provided a workshop entitled Blind and Socially Savvy. This innovative training took a renowned social skills and business etiquette curriculum from the International School of Protocol and adapted it to the unique needs of blind youth. The students learned leadership skills, social etiquette, continental dining skills, how to network, how to dress for success and much, much more. The students hosted two separate networking events where strangers to them from the world of business came to a social event to meet them and one another. The students handed out their own business cards and made a tremendous impression on others for themselves and for NCBVI in general. The program concluded with a three course graduation dinner where the students demonstrated their newly acquired eating skills and the students received a certificate for completing 40 hours of training.

The Blind and Socially Savvy program was offered and completed by 23 Pre-ETS youth and was conducted in two sessions. The first, to all the participants in our summer program WAGES, which is outlined below and a second time in a standalone group for youth 14 through 21 not in that program.

Strengths Series Workshops

At our request, the International school of Protocol has twice now created additional workshops with separate focus from the original program described above. The first of these was entitled “Blind & Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Harnessing the Power of Emotional Intelligence for Self-advocacy and College Success”. This offering was presented during a Winnerfest and there were 19 Pre-ETS individuals who attended. While it reinforced skills like working a room and public speaking, this curriculum had the students dig deeper within themselves and try to develop and utilize their own personal emotional intelligence. Students worked on everything from verbal and non-verbal communication, to concepts such as time management, relationship building and how to properly utilize technology, which is highly relevant for both future work and college settings. A particular highlight was the college recruiter fair reception. The students prepared one minute speeches to utilize in meeting the recruiters and they not only visited booths but also, navigated a reception style situation learning how to navigate both mobility wise and socially with food and drinks. There was also emotional intelligence sessions specific to blindness skills development. The curriculum concluded with a dining experience which simulated either a more formal business or social situation dinner which allowed the students to utilize their newly acquired food etiquette skills.

A second strength series was designed and executed as a kickoff to WAGES. This time the curriculum offering focused on workplace readiness skills and how to be socially savvy in the work environment. The students conducted many hands on activities, such

as, how to mingle with co-workers at a work based social gathering and they capped off the program with a graduation ceremony where they presented awards to one another in a banquet type setting. Just as the Blind and Socially Savvy had done the year prior, this workshop set a work like realism tone to WAGES and truly enhanced the skills possessed by students.

Winnerfest

As was implied above but not outright indicated, the “Blind and Socially Savvy: Strength Series” Winnerfest was conducted by a third party, which has become the new enhancement to this long running highly successful program. WIOA has allowed us to bring in expertise that our students can utilize to get a leg up on their sighted peers. Below is described several of the third party curriculum workshops we have had during Winnerfest along with the one outlined above.

We Fit Wellness

We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind, and the United States Association of Blind Athletes, the nation’s leading organization for recreation and competitive sports activity for blind persons of all ages, collaborated with us to conduct a fitness based program which attracted not only students who are frequent attendees but brought in a new group of students with other interests. It was entitled: “I Fit, You Fit, We Fit. During this program 22 youth were empowered to engage in better nutrition practices, exercise more and develop more appropriate eating strategies during the teen-age years. They were also exposed to a wide range of activities some unique to blindness and others were adaptations on the classics. These included swimming, judo, goalball, bowling, volleyball serving, basketball shooting, football throwing, kickball, cardio drumming exercising and strategies for exercises in places or situations without available equipment. Students also gained leadership skills and engaged in conversations during working meals that not only covered nutrition topics but also leadership and self-advocacy. The program even empowered the students to advocate for ongoing discussion to consider how to better market Winnerfest to their peers.

Next Gen by Dale Carnegie

Once we expanded Winnerfest by an additional day in order to accommodate the: Next Generation: training presented by the Dale Carnegie Corporation, which was adapted from their world renowned leadership trainings specifically for our pre-its youth. While other youth have taken “Next Generation” training and more than 8 million individuals have taken Carnegie leadership courses, it is the belief of both the local Carnegie franchise and NCBVI that this program was the first of its kind for blind students in the country. There were 20 participants who received leadership techniques, soft skills, social skills, self-advocacy skills, stress reduction strategies and work and school based readiness communication training presented in a targeted format that appealed to their age group and life experiences.

WAGES

Just as it has for more than 20 years now, WAGES continues to offer work based learning, blindness skill enhancement and a wide array of life experiences, as participants live on UNL city campus, utilize public transportation and engage in many recreational activities beyond their jobs. Since increased focus on Pre-ETS services

under the WIOA, we have expanded this program and in the past two summers the number of participants represent the largest groups in the programs history. In summer number one, youth completed work hours at both community based employment sites and in-house training with commission staff. Through a half day schedule, each week participants completed approximately 15 or more hours in each of these settings. This new programming model required an all hands on deck approach with nearly every staff member engaging in the program in some fashion. Commission staff from all three geographic districts and instructors from the Nebraska Center for the Blind were all directly engaged in providing blindness skill and work based job site training throughout the duration of the program. In fact, members of the Nebraska Center staff developed and created the skill training curriculum and materials which were utilized.

During summer number two, the skills training portion of the program was rolled back and we went back to a full time work based learning format, due to clarifications in the WIOA final rules.

One additional expansion to the WAGES program that was implemented both summers was an out of state trip to a blindness consumer convention. The purpose of which was to expose the participants to adult blind role models and empower them through the stretching of their thoughts about what they can accomplish in their lives. In addition, these trips afforded the students the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills into practice. Another additional benefit of the out of state trip is that it included many staff members as they helped chaperone the WAGES participants and their families. Whether it was flying and leaving Nebraska for the first time or simply navigating a hotel independently with a long white cane, everyone grew through one experience or another. In fact, the growth in the students was tremendous and they emerged as a group who sees their blindness as a part of them not a barrier to who they will become. In an effort to try and capture this growth and to empower the students to make the program better by shaping it with their input, we entered into a partnership with Gemini Research, a survey provider in the blindness field. The goal is to survey the WAGES students and assess their knowledge take away on many aspects of the program.

Enhancements and Innovations within the individualized Districts

While much of what WIOA requires and encourages is group service delivery in nature, certainly many Pre-ETS activities occur frequently in individual or non-statewide district group settings. WIOA has created a focus for our staff that we can devote more time to the Pre-ETS age group and thereby we have enhanced or innovated several new programs or ongoing efforts within the districts crossed the state.

Monthly District Meetings

The Lincoln and Omaha districts hold monthly groups, (TABS in Omaha and Stars in Lincoln), to deliver Pre-ETS required and authorized services. Students are able to work on their skills and explore their career options and become more job ready through engaging field experiences. The Omaha district also holds biweekly independence skills groups for VR clients who are children younger than the age of being eligible for Pre-ETS.

Parent Network

While the students in the Omaha district are completing their TABS group activities, generally on Saturday's, the parents meet in their own separate session, which has been dubbed the Parent Network. Parents interact with one another to share tips and strategies to best help their children navigate the world of school and VR and also learn about resources in the community such as, PTI Nebraska or Easter seals. These meetings are guided by Omaha staff but the parents suggest the content and drive the directions of the meetings. Recently, the Parent Network has begun offering a call in option by phone and the hope is to create enough interest in other parts of the state that we could begin spin off groups.

Outreach and Collaboration

As was mentioned above, WIOA requires that NCBVI make effort to intensify our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired and other education providers. The Transition Coordinator and regional NCBVI staff continue to make direct visits to ESUs and introduce ourselves and remind education personnel that we are the lead agency for youth in Nebraska who are experiencing blindness and visual impairment. Vocational Rehabilitation staff also continues to make visits to local school districts to try and build relationships and discover youth we may not have yet known about, some the law calls "potentially eligible".

NCBVI also continues to collaborate with NCECBVI, a state-wide, program and facility for blind school aged youth based out of ESU4. NCBVI staff attend the annual meetings of vision teachers called, Fall Foliage and Spring Fling and we have even been asked to present to this group. NCBVI continues to serve as a stakeholder in NCECBVI's annual meeting for this purpose and NCBVI transition staff have met with their administrative team to try and figure out joint programming opportunities. In addition, NCBVI transition staff help plan and present at Transition Conferences in each of the local areas. NCBVI also continues to present at courses of special education students at UNL which are conducted by the director of the vision endorsement program. It is our belief that these relationships and our programs have led to much growth in professional collaboration. Many teachers have expressed interest in attending our programs and one has attended a recent Winnerfest.

Comments:

Commissioner Bulger noted that he appreciated the before and after document that was provided for the Focus Topic. It was very helpful in trying to understand what the changes are.

Commissioner Bulger asked about the competitive employment, integrated employment and segregated employment aspects. In Omaha, Outlook Nebraska is one of the largest employers of blind people in Nebraska. Commissioner Bulger noted that he would call employment at Outlook Nebraska segregated employment. In that regard, he asked how WIOA will affect this.

Bob Deaton stated that WIOA has already made an affect. Prior to WIOA, NCBVI had been categorizing placement at Outlook Nebraska as a successful employment outcome. However, with WIOA the definition has changed so the placement must be competitive integrated employment. While Outlook Nebraska definitely pays minimum wage or higher, the employment is not integrated. In the law, the definition for

competitive employment was changed and it must also be integrated employment now. People may still choose to work at Outlook Nebraska; however, it will not be considered a successful employment outcome. NCBVI could still get Social Security reimbursement because Social Security does not care about the definition. They only care if the person is off benefits.

Commissioner Bulger asked how this will affect the Ability One program.

Bob Deaton stated many sheltered workshops will be closing over the next few years; but not all. If most of the employees are making at least minimum wage it will probably not make much of an affect. Bob stated that he does not believe that Outlook Nebraska employs anyone at a sub-minimum wage. As far as Ability One programs, he has not seen any discussion about any effect on Federal funding for those programs because of WIOA.

Commissioner Bulger asked that since placement at Outlook Nebraska would be considered an unsuccessful closure, will NCBVI be able to help with any work accommodations or training to support employment at Outlook Nebraska.

Director Serván stated that technically, we cannot because we are mandated to use our funds to support clients with a successful employment outcome. Director Serván noted that NCBVI does not hide the fact that there is Outlook Nebraska. If a client wants to work at Outlook Nebraska we will let them tour the facility and let them choose.

Commissioner Newman noted that he enjoyed reading about the new NCBVI programs or adaptations to existing programs as a result of WIOA.

Director Serván stated that NCBVI was doing several programs that other states were not. NCBVI realizes that the sooner you invest in training, the better. One of the things we added was technology training. NCBVI began purchasing technology equipment. The Federal government said that if we teach assistive technology it can be counted towards Pre-ETS time and funds. However, if you purchase the equipment, it is not. Director Serván stated that at the time he asked them to put this in writing but they did not. Therefore, we went ahead and purchased the technology equipment because it was covered under VR services. Recently, RSA said that the purchase of adaptive technology was considered under Pre-ETS. This was good news. We are still having some problems in counting transportation time and room and board for some of our programs towards Pre-ETS because RSA does not consider this to be direct services. Some states are proposing to sub-contract with other entities to run some of our programs and the entity charges for those programs. The current RSA interim commissioner is saying that if agencies abuse the approach of using sub-contractors they might say no because they do not want to see a lot of money spent on transportation and room and board when it is not direct services.

When our counselors spend time on Pre-ETS placement gets put on the back burner. Sub-contracting some programs would give our counselors more time to spend on placement.

Commissioner Bulger noted that Pre-ETS is all about preparing people for employment. Commissioner Bulger stated that the Nebraska Center for the Blind is primarily preparing blind people to be successful blind people, but it is not necessarily a career track that says when you attend the Center you are being prepared for a specific job. Commissioner Bulger stated that what he thinks needs to happen is when someone is blind or new to blindness, they need to make a career choice at the beginning and then all of our efforts need to focus on getting them prepared for the work environment since the focus now seems to be about jobs.

Director Serván stated that NCBVI has always had about 90 percent of our budget for jobs. Therefore, it has always been about jobs. Many agencies found ways to count homemakers as a successful closure; and therefore, the federal government became tougher because this is not the spirit of what the law says. In Nebraska, for at least the last 19 years, we have been focusing on jobs. In order for a blind person, either growing up blind or becoming blind, to be successful they need to master the skills of being independent and successful. Therefore, they need to get good blindness training before they can focus on employment. Director Serván stated that our challenge is individuals who are blind and also have other multiple disabilities. NCBVI has been training our staff members to understand that this is the population we have, so our counselors also need to know how to work with individuals with multiple disabilities. Director Serván noted that NCBVI's services are individualized.

Commissioner Rieken stated that she totally agrees with this. It is important that a person first accepts their blindness because then they are more prepared to focus on how they want to move forward.

Chairperson Hansen asked if job exploration counseling has changed with WIOA. Director Serván stated that with WIOA we now need to document everything.

Chairperson Hansen stated that he is unfamiliar with the Parent Group Network that was reported on as a part of NCBVI's Pre-ETS Programs and he asked for additional information as to what this group is.

Nancy Flearl stated that the Parent Group Network is being led by Tim Jefferson in the Omaha office. The group meets quarterly. They started out meeting in Omaha and they have opened it up for parents from across the state to call in and take part in the meeting. The meetings usually also consist of a guest speaker. In the past they have had the Easter Seals and Disability Rights present. The next meeting of the Parent Group Network will be Saturday, November 18 from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in Omaha. They will also have the capability to accommodate other parents calling in from other parts of the state via conference call.

Director Serván noted that RSA is telling us that we need to fulfill the five required areas before we can do the other nine authorized areas. Director Serván reported that NCBVI was doing all of those. The problem is, how to document that we are reaching as many Pre-ETS students for the five required areas before we start doing the nine authorized areas. Carol Jenkins, Nancy Flearl and Shane Buresh are working on putting together a document with information we got from the Technical Assistance Center (TAC).

Commissioner Bulger stated that he was pleased to see that there has been a lot of effort put towards working with the schools. It is important that we put the interests of the children and the family first. Everyone must work together for the long term goal.

Director Serván stated that in general that is the message from the federal government and the state government. We have a lot of resources that are being wasted because we aren't working together. The country cannot keep the luxury of wasting money. We need to put our differences aside and work together.

Bob Deaton noted that WIOA really does present a tremendous opportunity for NCBVI. The law requires closer relationships with entities that we had found some resistance towards. This will benefit everyone down the road.

Bob Deaton noted that former Director Dr. Van Zandt was informed at an NCSAB meeting last year that some Native American tribes find the acronym "WIOA" offensive when pronounced like a word. Apparently, it is a reference to private parts of the body. It is recommended that the letters of the abbreviation be sounded out individually.

Bob Deaton reported that RSA is in the process of collecting data for six indicators. The indicators are for VR agencies and core partners. The result of the two year evaluation period should be published in 2018. This will be a combined performance measure.

Chair Hansen thanked everyone for the information presented in the Focus Topic.

Quarterly Business

Report from the Executive Director

Client Statistics for Older Blind/Independent Living services

For FY 2017, under the Older Blind/Independent Living services, 328 applicants were accepted for services. There were 201 active clients on hand at the beginning of the year. This leaves a total of 529 clients available for action during the year.

Of the 529 clients:

311 clients were closed as successful with 8 clients referred to VR services.

30 clients were closed as unsuccessful for different reasons such as:

9 deceased, 2 institutionalized, 14 other reasons, and 5 withdrew.

188 clients remain in active status at the end of FY 2017.

Client Statistics for Vocational Rehabilitation Services

For FY 2017, 185 applicants were accepted for services. 22 applicants were not accepted for services for the following reason: 6 unable to locate, 1 does not require VR services, 5 no disabling condition, 4 refused further services, 3 all other reasons, and 3 no longer interested in receiving services.

320 clients were in active status at the beginning of the year, plus the 185 clients who were accepted for service since the beginning of the year, gives us a total of 505 clients available for action during the year. Of these 505 clients: 46 clients were closed successful. 65 clients were closed unsuccessful (after an IPE was developed) for the

following reasons: 4 death, 3 disability too significant to benefit from services, 1 does not require VR services, 2 health/medical, 5 no longer interested in receiving services, 24 refused services or further services, 4 transferred to another agency, and 12 unable to locate or contact and 10 all other reasons.

6 clients were closed before an IPE was developed: 2 refused services and 4 unable to locate or contact.

387 clients remain in active status. The total number of VR clients served in Active Status's in FY 2017 was 505.

The supervisors and counselors are working to make sure that we can provide quality services with the limited budget for this year, due to the lack of extra federal reallocation.

On August 18, the field supervisors, Bill Brown and I went to a state wide negotiation meeting for WIOA Local Boards. We started discussion on how much each partner will contribute with the American Job Centers (AJC). After several weeks of negotiations, we came to an agreement on what will be NCBVI contribution for the AJC.

On August 30, I sent an email to Mr. Rasmussen, the DAS staff in charge of coordinating the development and implementation of FuzioN, the new software system for the state, expressing my concern that it would not be accessible to blind people if it is not tested from the beginning. The next day, the director of DAS, Byron Diamond called me about FuzioN and after I explained to him the situation, he assured me that if it was not accessible, FuzioN will not be implemented. Later that week, I also brought the issue to the State ADA Task Force regarding the accessibility on the new FuzioN program. The members of the ADA Task Force unanimously voted to support us to assure that FuzioN is accessible.

On September 1, Bill Brown, Bob Deaton, Shane Buresh, and I had a conference call with RSA representatives to start working on developing and implementing policy for Pre-ETS. We were told that we needed to have a Plan of Action on Pre- Employment Transition Services policies and procedures. This Plan of Action was submitted on September 29.

In September, I attended a meeting of the Omaha Association for the Blind and in October I attended the state convention of the NFB of Nebraska. During this time I had a chance to share NCBVI's vision as well as listen to consumer input and concerns.

We submitted the new PILBO grant in September for 2018. Bob Deaton completed a working draft for a comprehensive history of rehabilitation services for the blind in Nebraska with a focus on NCBVI.

In the area of HR, Nancy Burdine was hired on August 31 for the Technology Manager position and she should be completing her training by the end of December. Nancy comes to the agency from the Department of Transportation

Carol Jenkins was promoted to the position of Deputy Director for Services. She will also still supervise the Center for a few more months.

Bill Brown announced that he will be retiring in August of 2018. Bill Brown and I met with the Director of State Personnel to work on restructuring the agency as part of our Succession Planning. We are proposing to have only one Deputy Director and having the position reclassified. As it is, State Personnel has in their classification two Assistant Directors under Services for the Visually Impaired. During this meeting we also talked about hiring in advance for the position Bill Brown will vacate. The person who will be hired for this new position will get the four months training at the Center and he/she will be trained by Bill on all aspects of the Business Office for around three months.

Josie Rodriguez, our rehab tech from Scottsbluff is retiring on November 16. Cheryl Poff, an Orientation Counselor from Omaha is retiring on December 22. Connie Carlow, the rehab tech from Norfolk is retiring on December 15. We are in the process of hiring in advance for Connie Carlow's position as she also supports the Business Office, so she will have time to train the new staff before she leaves. Interviews were conducted and Stephanie Olson has accepted the position. Stephanie will begin her employment on November 27, 2017.

The following staff was recognized for their years of service: Connie Carlow – 35 years, Nancy Flearl - 35 years, Fritz Nuffer – 30 years, Nancy Coffman – 30 years, Larry Mackey – 30 years, Bob Deaton – 30 years, Cindy Zimmer - 25 years, and Cheryl Livingston - 20 years.

Julie Buren and Jeff Altman were selected by the Governor for the State Excellence of Leadership award. Erin Brandyberry and Shane Buresh completed their Leadership training at the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute the third week of October.

Kathy and Bob are working on revisions to the Rules and Regulations. Once the revisions are completed they will be sent to the commissioners for review and then sent to the Governor's Policy Research Office (GPRO) for approval. Once GPRO approval is given, a date will be set for a Public Hearing of Rules and Regulation.

The 2018 State Staff meeting has been scheduled for April 11 and 12 in Lincoln.

The AWARE transition was successful. Staff members work diligently on transferring the data from eForce, our old data system, into AWARE.

Connie Daly and I attended the Federal Legislative Summit put on by the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, field staff is getting involved with businesses to build partnerships and to network. Some staff members are also getting training with Leadership programs in their communities. Being involve in these events will help to get leadership skills as well as having the opportunity to network in their communities.

Our complaint with the City of Lincoln filed by Connie Daly was found in our favor. As a result, Connie Daly was appointed to the Greater Lincoln Workforce Board. Furthermore, the app that the AJC was part of developing was made accessible. Connie was also invited to participate in the Lincoln Business Taskforce. This is a group of case managers who meet monthly to share contacts and job opportunities.

Our District Supervisors are attending the Local WIOA Board meetings and representing NCBVI. Nancy Flearl attended training at HKNC on Enhancing Successful Employment Outcomes for Deaf-Blind Individuals. The Lincoln District and the Transition Coordinator continue to build a relationship with NCECBVI and we will have a meeting with the director on December 12 to further opportunities for blind students in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Center has 5 people in training, 4 clients and 1 staff trainee. Several clients graduated and a few cancelled their starting date due to health reasons. We continue to get tours at the Center for clients and schedule future training.

Nebraska Business Enterprise:

The second week of October, we opened four locations with the Nebraska Department of Corrections in Lincoln, two under a current operator and two others for a new operator in training.

There are two candidates currently in training to become licensed vendors. One, in Lincoln, has completed all training and OJT requirements and began operations on October 16. The second, in Omaha, has completed training and is ready to begin OJT for four weeks.

Another facility for vending has just opened at Social Security in Omaha. This location was added to a current operator's business.

Many of our current and new operators have taken training courses on-line for BEP, through the Hadley Institute for the Blind. There is the full program for new operators and individual courses for others.

Carrie DeFreece worked full time at the Camp Ashland Dining Facility through Mid-September to fulfill our contract with the National Guard. A new blind operator began OJT at the Camp Ashland cafeteria as the Dining Facility Manager and took over operations in Mid-September. In discussions with the Nebraska Military, the Army is "going green" all over the country, meaning that all dining facilities will now be run by military personnel. They intend to provide 60-90 days' notice of a cancellation in the contract. There will likely be a new, separate agreement for Dining Facility Attendant services. Carrie has spoken with Chief Hancock regarding this and it is the National Guard's understanding that JWOD contractors would get the priority, rather than Randolph- Sheppard. After learning that, Carrie DeFreece contacted Susan Gaschel who drafted a letter to Chief Hancock stating that the RS Act would still have priority for the new contract and that NCBVI wants to bid on any potential new contracts to provide services at the dining facility.

Two potential new teaming partners met with Offutt Air Force Base officials to look at a future new large cafeteria. However the \$1.5 Million cost for equipment may be prohibitive. Several questions were posed by NCBVI Executive Director on behalf of the Teaming Partners over a month ago without response from Offutt at this time.

There will be 3,500 employees in that new building. If offered this contract, the vending facility would begin operations by Summer-Winter 2019.

Susan Gaschel wrote a letter to RSA requesting arbitration against the VA. RSA responded the first week of October stating that we need to work with the VA on what facilities we could operate. The VA has appointed an attorney to represent them in the arbitration. NCBVI and the VA have 90 days to discuss and agree on what locations would be run by Randolph-Sheppard and which ones by the Canteen operators. After the 90 days deadline, RSA should appoint an Arbitrator.

Commissioner Bell asked if NCBVI will be rehiring for the VR tech position in Scottsbluff after Josie retires. Director Serván stated that for now our VR tech in Kearney, Adrienne Moody, who is working full time, will support the three North Platte district offices. Adrienne did a good job of filling in for Josie when she was out on leave for an extended period. The Scottsbluff VR tech position will be kept open for now and evaluated.

Commissioner Rieken asked what the reasoning is for going from two deputy directors to one deputy director. Director Serván stated that going back to the history of NCBVI, there used to be only one deputy director. Then, the services for Older Blind grew and there became a need for two deputy directors, one for older blind and independent living and another for VR. As the years went by things kept evolving. Now, RSA is putting more emphasis on VR and not spending money or time on older blind. Also, the field supervisors used to carry a case load and he wants to make sure that they are supervisors and not counselors. This is the main reason.

Commissioner Bulger asked Director Serván how his new job as executive director has been going. Director Serván stated that he wanted to thank Dr. Pearl Van Zandt again because she was very transparent in working with the Leadership Team for many years. During the transition he also met with Dr. Van Zandt and she shared with him a lot of information. Also, the fact that he was the deputy director for client services for about 19 years and worked next to Dr. Van Zandt all those years, he feels very comfortable. Also, working with the commissioners and the deputy directors and supervisors, it is just the right place to be.

Commissioner Bulger stated that he is also glad to see NCBVI represented on the WIOA boards locally.

NCBVI Staff Reports

Lincoln District Highlights – Connie Daly

Connie Carlow announced that she is retiring after 35 years with us. Her last day with us will be December 15th. We are sad to see Connie leave. We are excited about the time she will have to spend with her kids and grandkids and wish her the very best. We are going through applications now and hope to hire within the next couple of weeks so that Connie can be part of the training.

We spent quite a bit of time obtaining data to be entered into the new AWARE system. Charli Saltzman is attending Leadership Lincoln and John Schmitt is attending Leadership Norfolk. These programs teach some leadership skills as well as being an important networking opportunity. Stephanie Wagle will attend Fall Foliage at NCECBVI. I attended the Federal Legislative Summit put on by the Chamber of Commerce.

We had a one day retreat for the Lincoln District. We had a presentation from Pat Fischer at Nanopac and Marlene Dufek from Developmental Disabilities. Marlene's presentation was about Autism and working. We also had some team building activities.

Stephanie is working with several students at NCECBVI. She has done some joint teaching projects with the staff there. Our relationship with the school is becoming stronger. We both value this partnership and it is exciting.

We wrote an article for Omaha and Lincoln's Strictly Business magazine. Eric is editing video from WAGES and PI. He is also starting to work on a Center video. Larry Mackey presented information to teachers through a program by League of Human Dignity. Stephanie and I presented information as part of a Diversity Panel for Leadership Lincoln. Amy provided a presentation to the staff of Easter Seals.

Our complaint with the City of Lincoln was found in our favor. I was appointed to the Greater Lincoln Workforce Board. The app that the AJC was part of developing was made accessible. I was also invited to participate in the Lincoln Business Taskforce. This is a group of case managers who meet monthly to share contacts and job openings. They also arrange tours of businesses. I was on the planning committee for a job fair on October 6. The first two hours of the job fair were for case managers and then it was open to the public. We made some promising contacts.

We had clients get jobs as a Laborer, a Braille Instructor with UNL, self-employed Artist, Graphic Designer and a Recreation Worker and two Dishwashers. We helped a Financial Manager and English Language and Literature Instructor maintain employment.

Omaha District Highlights - Nancy Flearl

As the new school year starts we do our outreach to vision teachers in our territory. Also, Shane Buresh and Stephanie Wagle did a wonderful presentation on our transition services and the importance of early referral. Hence we have experienced an above average number of referrals. Vision teachers are realizing that we need to work with students that have visual impairment and intellectual disabilities as well. This also means attending many team meetings (Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings or Individual Education Plan Meetings). Larry continues to keep us updated on the newest technology and changes with Microsoft or IOS products. He has been doing work with the vision teachers in the Millard Public School District to troubleshoot technology.

Kelly is working with the transition committee on Winnerfest and is playing a part in the coordination of consistent statewide transition services with Shane Buresh. Kelly along with the transition committee will attend Fall Foliage at NCECBVI.

I attended training at HKNC on Enhancing Successful Employment Outcomes for Deaf-Blind Individuals.

We have several individuals that are interested in the Randolph Sheppard Program. One attended the most recent meeting of the Blind Licensee Committee on September 9.

Several staff attended the Omaha Council of the Blind picnic for teens and their families on September 15. A number of our consumers and their families were in attendance.

I attended the NFBN state convention on October 15 with several clients currently in Center training.

I attended the Outlook Nebraska Open House on October 13. This was their outreach for the year to raise awareness of vision loss in the community. The Open House took place of a sit down dinner.

We continue to network with our business partners. These activities are conducted through the Chamber, Heartland Workforce Solutions, Empowerment network, Latino Chamber of Commerce, Metro Placement Professionals, WIN Meetings, etc. We are going to put an even greater focus in this area for placement efforts and work experience opportunities.

Networking is two-fold as it helps lead to possible comparable benefits. I visited with Bill Biggs with the Lion's Club and learned they have a budget to serve older individuals experiencing vision loss and needing assistance to retain their independence. I will be reaching out to see how we can collaborate statewide.

Kathy and Elaine have been attending some training hosted by PTI, Nebraska on Autism and are bringing some great information back to us as a district.

We have several consumers preparing to attend the Nebraska Center for the Blind and have been doing group teaching sessions in our office. Several individuals have been taking tours this month.

We continue our group teaching sessions for pre-transition and transition students. Quarterly, we coordinate a Parent Network Meeting with it being open statewide for parents to call in to participate. The August meeting was Benefits Planning with Easter Seals. November's meeting is on advocacy and PTI. Nebraska and Disability Rights will present along with a Department of Administrative Services on ADA.

Kim, Tim and Kathy hold a Job Club on Wednesday's.

We made a nomination of several businesses to the N.W. Rotary and they chose to recognize a small business "Big Mama's Kitchen and Catering" for providing a work experience that has led to employment. They received their award on October 24.

Cheryl did a presentation on deaf blindness at a statewide meeting with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on October 18. There was great discussion on the importance of working in partnership with the individuals experiencing a dual sensory loss.

We submitted the new PILBO grant in September for 2018 and the final grant report for 2017 will be due February 2018. This grant is for the Omaha Metro Area and we use these funds to serve IL and OIB consumers.

I am happy to report that we have hired two new drivers. I am thankful for the dedication of Beth Galli, Deb Stanton and Sharon Vacanti who have been great at working with us in providing services to consumers of NCBVI.

Lastly, Cheryl Poff did submit her intent to retire on December 22, 2017. We will have reception for her on that day with more details to follow.

North Platte District - Erin Brandyberry

The North Platte District has been busy with adjusting to the new AWARE system which overall is going very well. Staff is working very hard to keep up with their caseloads while learning the new system. We had two clients gain employment, one at Pizza Hut and one at the United Methodist Church. We have one client who is working towards becoming an NBE vendor in North Platte. Staff has attended community connection meetings, brain advisory council meetings, ADRC meetings, presentations at VIPS meetings, presentation for Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs, booth at disability fair, presentation for older blind housing community, and a booth at a Kearney Night Market with a disabilities focus.

Angie was accepted and started the Leadership Scottsbluff program and is working on networking and building relationships in Western Nebraska.

I have attended meetings for the Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board regarding the American Job Centers in Grand Island and Beatrice. I have been nominated to represent NCBVI on the board for Greater Nebraska and we should hear back by the end of October if the nomination is accepted.

Josie Rodriguez, our VR tech in Scottsbluff, is retiring November 16, 2017. She has worked for our agency for many years and will be greatly missed. Adrienne Moody, Kearney VR tech, will be covering the VR tech duties for the North Platte District until we are ready to hire again.

Center's Quarterly Report - Carol Jenkins

Currently: 4 Clients
1 Staff Trainee
3 Three Day Stays
1 Student had a Commencement Meal

Tours: New Budget Analyst, one consumer from North Carolina, and 12 agency consumers.

Activities: Solar Eclipse Party and Video, OCB Picnic, Sensory Safari, Huskers Helping the Homeless Volunteer Activity, NFBN State Convention, Fall Luncheon Buffet, Pumpkin Carving for those who chose to, and KFOR Talk Turkey-thon Volunteer Activity.

Some Center Staff Attended: The OCB Picnic, NFBN State Convention, and a VFO technology demonstration.

Center Supervisor: Continues to speak to all NCBVI districts on Center changes and updates, continues to participate in monthly Center Director's conference calls, and continues to work with agency staff on AWARE. The Center Supervisor attended the VR Summit Conference and ADA Training with General VR. The Center Supervisor also is the Deputy Director for Services and is balancing both jobs.

Additional Notes: The Center completed and passed our three-year recertification through the NBPCB with a 95%. Even though the student numbers are low due to a few graduations, agency consumers continue to tour and schedule 3 day stays.

Nebraska Business Enterprise – Carrie DeFreece

NBE opened four locations with the Nebraska Department of Corrections in Lincoln, two under a current operator and two others with a new operator on training. Additional Nebraska Department of Corrections vending locations in Omaha will be opened as new vendors become trained and ready to operate the facility.

There are two candidates currently in training to become licensed vendors. One, in Lincoln, has completed all training and OJT requirements and began operations on October 16. He will have a 90-day probationary period. The second, in Omaha, has completed training and is ready to begin OJT for four weeks. The program is looking for several more clients to begin training due to the availability of several potential vending opportunities.

Carrie DeFreece worked full time at the Camp Ashland Dining Facility from May through Mid-September to fulfill our contract with the National Guard. A new blind operator began OJT at the Camp Ashland Facility as the Dining Facility Manager and took over operations in Mid-September. In discussions with the Nebraska Military, the Army is "going green" all over the country, meaning that all dining facilities will now be run by military personnel. They intend to provide 60-90 days' notice of a cancellation in the contract. There will likely be a new, separate agreement for Dining Facility Attendant services. Carrie has spoken with Chief Hancock regarding this and it is the NEANG's

understanding that JWOD contractors would get the priority, rather than Randolph Sheppard. Carrie contacted Susan Gaschel who drafted a letter to Chief Hancock stating that the RS Act would still have priority for the new contract and that NCBVI wants to bid on any potential new contracts to provide services at the dining facility. This has been sent to Chief Hancock via certified mail and includes several citations of other states and rulings that have determined that Randolph Sheppard does have priority and supersedes the JWOD Act.

Carrie is now focusing efforts to assist licensees in increasing options offered and looking for ways to increase efficiency at each site.

Two potential new teaming partners met with Offutt Air Force Base officials to look at a future new large cafeteria. However the \$1.5 Million cost for equipment may be prohibitive. Several questions were posed by NCBVI Executive Director on behalf of the Teaming Partners over a month ago without response from Offutt at this time. There will be 3,500 employees in that new building. If offered this contract, the vending facility would begin operations by Summer-Winter 2019.

Susan Gaschel wrote a letter to RSA requesting arbitration against the VA, who has appointed an attorney to represent them in the arbitration. NCBVI and the VA have 90 days to discuss and agree on what locations would be run by Randolph-Sheppard and which ones by the canteen operators. After the 90 days deadline, RSA should appoint an Arbitrator.

Another facility for vending has just opened with social security in Omaha and it was added to a current operator.

Many of our current and new operators have taken training courses on-line for BEP, through the Hadley school, and it seems to be working well. There is the full program for new operators and individual courses for others.

Victor Ireland, who was in the vending program, passed away in July after battling his cancer for several months. He had moved back to Indiana to be with his family. Finally for your information, the Department of Roads has changed its name to Department of Transportation.

Transition Program – Shane Buresh

Since the board of commissioners last met, we held a very successful project independence program. This year the program was based on a pioneer same "we put the PI and pioneer in "exploring our future frontier. We tied together the two experiences that the early settlers to Nebraska must've experienced and those that we as blind people experience as we have to prepare ourselves for future success. 10 students, ages 8 to 13, completed the program and engaged in such activities as: running a party planning business and throwing a birthday party for Nebraska, making pioneer era toys, planting plants, fishing, audio archery, Field trips to the state capital and Nebraska historical museum, conducted the sixth annual home chore challenge and held our usual blindness skill building classes, among many other activities.

Fall programs are also well underway. On Saturday, November 4, while all of you are meeting, we will be wrapping up the fall Winnerfest program. The program this time is collaboration with Wii fit wellness out of Colorado. Instead of being fitness oriented though, the programming centers on many of the required activities under WIOA. The students will be talking about job exploration, talking about future job trends, conducting Mock job interviews, working on leadership and self-advocacy skills, conducting a volunteer job activity which is considered work-based learning, and much more.

In terms of developments with other partners in the transition process, we have also had exciting developments with NCECBVI. They invited us down in September to a day designed for parents' state wide, to help them put on a workshop on college preparation. We were able to present the information about NCBVI and how to access our services in the school years, which was about half of the agenda. We also remained around and built relationships with parents and teachers, and in one case had a referral come out of this process. Ongoing, NCBVI and NCECBVI are scheduling meetings to collaborate on other requirements under WIOA related to information sharing and program expansion.

During this past quarter we were also approached by the National Federation of the Blind about a mentoring program which would cover the required areas of WIOA, in the arena of Pre-ETS services. We have begun negotiations on what this program would mean for our existing programs as well as expansion of what we do. While we have not finalized the relationship, it looks very promising that we will each be able to satisfactorily work together to create more opportunities for the youth that we serve in the area of transition.

Quarterly Highlights - Bob Deaton

I completed a working draft for a comprehensive history of rehabilitation services for the blind in Nebraska.

I submitted a grant application to the Enrichment Foundation for continuation funding in support of PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha).

I prepared a Plan of Action for implementation of Pre-ETS to Samuel Pierre, RSA
Completed professional development plan reviews for VR and Orientation Counselors, Technology Specialists, and Rehabilitation Technicians.

I prepared a document highlighting changes brought about by WIOA for presentation to the Board of Commissioners

Quarterly Highlights - Bill Brown

I was part of the application screening and interview process for hiring our new Deputy Director.

I have been working on a listing of my job duties, a calendar of dates that drive much of the work that I do, and suggestions for improvement.

I have been working with Carlos on putting together a plan for hiring an early “understudy” to work with me and become oriented to the duties of my job before I am retired. We are working with State Personnel on this. Currently Carlos and Personnel are reviewing the functions of the Business manager III, Administrative Assistant II, Deputy Director for Staff Development, Administrative Assistant III, IT Infrastructure Analyst Senior, and the VR Tech in Norfolk to more efficiently distribute the duties among staff during the time of turnover.

Working on the processing of payments in AWARE in coordination with E1 payments to better utilize our processes to maximize the system for internal control and handling issues. Authorizations and plans have been dealt with and while there are some issues, supervisors have generally been pleased with the outcome.

Working with our accounting structure to insure that Pre-Employment service plans can be implemented and reported on. Working with Julie, Dave, Supervisors and Administrators to identify appropriate costs and implement Federal guidance on this accounting.

Working with Staff on establishing a base cost for the Workforce “American Job Centers” in Omaha, Lincoln, and Greater Nebraska. Established a temporary system to identify split of costs among the partners until better data can be recorded on a permanent basis.

Interviewed Candidate for IT Infrastructure Support Position and assisted on the Selection team to make a job offer to Nancy Burdine.

Working on the next step in AWARE to establish a methodology for AWARE and EnterpriseOne, the state accounting system to make information available to each other and make the system more efficient. EnterpriseOne will be replaced with FuzioN in 2018/2019. This will set our time frame back for this project, but it is hoped that this new accounting system will be easier to use for staff and accessible.

I familiarized our new State Budget Analyst with the NCBVI.

Certified Biennial costs that ran between SFY’s 2017 and 2018 where services were provided in 2017, yet not paid until 2018.

Set up new Business Units and Accounting Information for the new Federal Fiscal year Grants. While amounts and grants are not available, it is necessary to have the infrastructure available in EnterpriseOne to ensure a smooth transition between years.

H/R Quarterly Highlights - Dave Robinson

Josie Rodriguez returned to work on July 5, 2017.

Wes Majerus' last day with the agency was June 23, 2017. The job posting for the position that he's vacating was posted on June 20, 2017 and closed July 7, 2017. Thirty-four applications were received and the applicant chosen for the position was Nancy Burdine. Nancy comes to the agency from the Dept. of Roads and started with our agency on August 31, 2017.

Pearl Van Zandt retired July 6, 2017 and Carlos Serván was named as Interim Executive Director, while a search for a permanent replacement began. Carlos was named as Executive Director on August 18, 2017.

Posting for the Deputy Director of VR position vacated by Carlos was advertised. Twelve applications were received and Carol Jenkins was the candidate chosen. Carol will, for the time being, maintain some of her previous duties as Center Director, while delegating some of those duties out to other staff.

Cheryl Poff announced her retirement plans, effective December 22, 2017.

Josie Rodriguez announced her retirement plans, effective November 16, 2017.

Connie Carlow announced her retirement plans, effective December 15, 2017.

A job posting for Connie Carlow's position was posted and 30 applications were received. As of this writing, they are being numerically scored, to determine an interview pool. We will be doing approximately six weeks of overlap training with Connie's position. Due to the detailed/complex duties Connie also performs for the business office, administration determined that it necessary to have Connie's successor begin training as soon as possible, while Connie was still with the agency, to assure a smooth transition in December.

Quarterly Highlights - Kathy Stephens

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2017 deadline.

Worked with Office Innovations to move several desks around in the Lincoln office and haul some items to State Surplus.

I completed registrations and hotel reservations for some clients and staff attending the NFBN convention in Norfolk, Nebraska and several other trainings/conferences.

I am working with Bob Deaton to get NCBVI Rules and Regulations ready to be set for a Public Hearing. This has been a time consuming process.

The 2018 State Staff meeting has been scheduled. It will be April 11 and 12 at the Hyatt Place Haymarket in Lincoln, Nebraska.

NCBVI has received quite a few donations for memorials during this past quarter. In August we received \$275, September \$10 and October \$500 in memorial donations.

Budget and Biennium Update

Director Serván stated that the biennium update is basically the same that we provided at the beginning of the fiscal year. Director Serván reported that in general we are still spending more money than we can afford to so we are continuing to work on cutting expenses.

Bill Brown reported that there are State budget issues, but we have not heard anything official from the Budget office. Bill, Carol and Carlos will meet with the NCBVI budget analyst on November 13 and they hope to learn more at that time.

Chairperson Hansen asked for clarification on the statement that we are currently spending more money than we can afford. Bill Brown stated that we accumulated over the years more money than we spent. Therefore, we are going to be fine for a while, but that balance is moving its way down fairly quickly. When we received the extra money we knew that this was always a possibility. We are now working on slowing the spending down. Bill Brown reported that our grants right now are about 4.2 million dollars and we are bringing in about .5 million in social security reimbursements. Last year we spent almost 6 million dollars, but we put AWARE in place which will save us money from what the eForce system was costing us. While AWARE cost about .5 million dollars, it is an investment in the future and it puts us in a much better position.

Bill Brown reported that we have also been expanding our vending program and replacing vending machines. When we had extra money we decided to put our infrastructure in a good position so when things got lean we would be best prepared for that. NCBVI has been investing a lot in in-service training and training our staff in order for them to have good knowledge in order to carry out their jobs.

Bill Brown noted that as soon as we found out about the low reallocation amount that we would be receiving we have been doing some re-prioritizing on our spending. We are working very hard to reposition ourselves. We have always kept it in the back of our minds that reallocation funds are year-to-year. Last year our carry-over funds lasted until about the middle of August. This year, our carry-over funds will last until about the first of April or May. We have not received social security reimbursement at this point so that is another variable.

Commissioner Bulger asked if there are any concerns with state match dollars. Director Serván stated that we are still okay in this area.

Chair Hansen thanked Director Serván and Bill Brown for the report on the budget.

Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim stated that he had a concern/suggestion regarding the hiring practice to fill the executive director position that was vacated by Dr. Pearl Van Zandt. Jim noted for the record that this is not a reflection on the outcome of the individual who was hired to replace Dr. Van Zandt. Jim stated that back in June 2017 he encouraged the Board to hire an outside consultant to aid in the process of hiring an executive director. He realizes that hiring an executive director for NCBVI is not done on a frequent basis. Jim

stated that he believes a hiring consultant would have a lot more wisdom than the board in reaching out to various avenues and sources to seek candidates. Jim noted that this is not an insult to the board, but just how he sees it. Jim stated that he understands that there were three individuals interviewed out of the applicants that were received and he believes that the board hired the best candidate. Jim stated that he would encourage the board, next time there is an executive director opening, to consider hiring an outside consultant to assist in getting qualified candidates.

Chair Hansen noted that the board has received some feedback from some individuals about why they did not get more qualified applicants. The board did think that they would receive more applicants than the 14 they received. It was the board's intention to interview only three or four top applicants. The board has received some feedback as to why the number was as small as it was. The position is very specialized and the candidate needed to have specific experience in rehabilitation. Chair Hansen noted that hiring a consultant may have gotten more applicants, but he doesn't know.

Jim stated that he just hopes that the best qualified candidate was hired and that it was based on qualifications and not personal wants and needs of the board. Chair Hansen stated that he can assure him that this was the case hands down. The best candidate was hired. Commissioner Bulger added that the executive director hire was a unanimous decision of the board.

Commissioner Newman noted that he did some inquiring around the blindness community because there are other blind people in the community that have rehab backgrounds that are currently in high positions that did not apply. Most of the individuals reported that they knew Carlos Serván was applying for the job and because of Carlos' good work they did not feel that they had a chance.

Jim Jirak asked what happened to the Report of the Chair as an agenda item. Chair Hansen reported that the commissioners decided to have this item removed from the agenda.

Break

A break was taken at 11:02 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11:20 a.m.

Newsline® Update

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®

October 31, 2017

Jamie K. Richey, Outreach Coordinator

During the recent National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska state convention I gave a presentation on Newsline and its many features and new updates. I took a look back over the past ten years and how NFB-Newsline® has grown. Newsline has been available in Nebraska since 1999, but I have personally seen how much it has changed since taking over as outreach coordinator in September 2007.

When I took over the position the only way to access Newsline was via touch tone telephone. Now Newsline can be accessed online, via email, on many digital book players, through the mobile app and soon as a skill for the Amazon Echo. Hundreds of publications have been added nationwide and here in Nebraska the Grand Island Independent, the Kearney Hub and the Norfolk Daily News are among those. At one time only newspapers could be read on Newsline, but now subscribers can access TV listings, job listings, magazines, store circulars and breaking news and weather alerts.

Back in 2007 Nebraska had 1,084 subscribers and now 2,038 subscribers read NFB-Newsline® in our state. Around 53.45% of the subscribers who still use the telephone to access Newsline do so using the regional number cutting down on cost of operations. Ten years ago this option was not available and even when it did become available many subscribers were reluctant to use the regional number due to long distance phone charges. Today with cell phones and unlimited long distance that is a worry of the past. On average subscribers spend 18,480 minutes reading Newsline via the phone which has stayed consistent even as more people use the other methods of accessing Newsline.

A lot has changed over the past decade and I have no doubt that the service will continue to grow and expand over the coming years. New publications are always being added and it will be interesting to see what is in the works. Stay tuned later this year as a new version of the mobile app is released as well as the release of the Amazon Echo Skill.

This is my final report of Newsline as I am stepping down as Outreach Coordinator. Bryan Baldwin of Lincoln will be taking over and I am confident he will do an excellent job! Bryan can be reached at the same contact information for Newsline as before: phone: (402) 471-8102 and E-mail: newsline@ne.nfb.org. If you have specific questions about this transition please contact me, otherwise please direct all Newsline related questions to Bryan in the future. I appreciate the support over the past 10 years I've received from the NFB of Nebraska and NCBVI and I hope the same level of support will be extended to Bryan. I've been honored to serve in this volunteer position and will continue to be a great supporter of NFB-Newsline®! Thank you for everything and happy reading!

Chair Hansen thanked Jamie Forbis for 10 years of doing a great job as the Nebraska NFB-Newsline® coordinator.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

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

Shari Bahenski reported that she attended the NCBVI Supervisor Meetings, as well as the Administrative Team meeting. She also met and shared information/resources regarding the Client Assistance Program and Hotline for Disability Services with the North Platte area office. The Kearney and Scottsbluff staff was also present.

Anonymous Staff Suggestion Box Comments

Chair Hansen stated that there was one anonymous staff suggestion in the suggestion box that he is aware of. He noted that he would put the suggestion in the category of there would have been a better way to address the issue. This person stated that they would really appreciate if their fellow employees chose to know when to use “reply” instead of “reply all” when it comes to email.

Chair Hansen stated that everyone should be considerate and think about who their audience is when sending an email.

New Business

Discuss and Act on revoking requirement of notice of retirement from Executive Director

Chair Hansen reported that about a year ago the board issued a memorandum requesting that the executive director give six months’ notice prior to their leaving the employment of NCBVI and if this was not followed there were some options that the board could choose to enact. During the recent retirement of Dr. Van Zandt and process the board went through to find her successor there was some further discussions with the office of State Personnel about that policy primarily in the area of compensation. A policy such as this with the rules around how the executive director is hired and so on, there is an interpretation of something like this where if the board was to let the executive director go they would be required to pay them their salary for six months. A policy like this works both ways and it is a liability for the agency. Chair Hansen stated that instead of having a policy on an executive director giving an advance notice if they decide to leave they should just ask that the executive director give as much notice as they can.

Commissioner Bulger moved to rescind the memo that the board issued about the executive director retirement notice.

Commissioner Newman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Officer Elections

Commissioner Newman moved to elect Commissioner Hansen as Chairperson.

Commissioner Hansen accepted the nomination. Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken; Newman, Bell, Bulger and Rieken were in favor of the motion. Commissioner Hansen abstained.

Commissioner Bulger moved to elect Commissioner Newman as Vice Chairperson.

Commissioner Newman accepted the nomination. Commissioner Bell seconded the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Bell moved to elect Commissioner Rieken as Executive Secretary.

Commissioner Rieken accepted the motion. Commissioner Bulger seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken; Newman, Hansen, Bell and Bulger were in favor of the motion. Commissioner Rieken abstained.

Public Comment

Ryan Osentowski – Ryan reported that he took a job in Nebraska as the station manager for Radio Talking Book Services. Ryan stated that it is good to be back in Nebraska although he did enjoy living in Denver especially with their transit system. Is where he is spoiled in Nebraska is with the rehab system. Ryan stated that about 19 years ago he stood on the State Capitol lawn and protested because Governor Nelson shot down the establishment of the Commission for the Blind the first time they tried to become a separate state agency. Ryan stated that it is important because the blind community had to fight for NCBVI. Ryan thanked everyone for their service and for caring about the state of Nebraska rehab services and the lives of blind people. Ryan asked that NCBVI keep its presence active on social media. Ryan noted that they are running our Public Meeting announcements on Radio Talking Book and he is happy to keep doing so.

Typical Final Announcements

Chair Hansen thanked Josie Rodriguez, Connie Carlow and Cheryl Poff for their years of service at NCBVI as they will all be retiring before the end of the year.

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on February 3, 2018 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be Youth Services.

Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the February 4, 2018 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Mike Hansen, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners