

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting
Saturday, November 1, 2014; 9:00 AM
Omaha State Office Building
1313 Farnam on the Mall, Room 226

APPROVED MINUTES

Mike Hansen, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mike Hansen, Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Jim Jirak, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Becky Rieken, South Sioux City; and Julie Johnson, York.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor, Omaha; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director, Lincoln; Tim Jefferson, VR Counselor, Omaha; Monique Orrante, VR Technician, Omaha.

Public Present: Hubert Paulsen, meeting recorder, Lincoln; Dale Oviatt, Omaha; Barbara Epworth, Omaha; Carol Gibilisco, Omaha; Kenda Slavin, Omaha; Mark Bulger, Omaha; Cindy White, Omaha; Brad Loos, Lincoln; Barbara Loos, Lincoln. Attending the Focus Topic portion of the meeting via conference call was Amy Buresh, Lincoln.

It was noted that public comments are welcome during the set Public Comment Periods regarding the agenda items or other relevant issues. Hubert Paulsen recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website. Pizza will be delivered at 12 noon and the meeting will continue with a working lunch.

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 Newsline®, and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACB and NFB, the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of August 2 Minutes

Commissioner Jim Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the August 2, 2014 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Robert Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: The collaborative process between the agency and consumer organizations to further advance independent living and employment of blind Nebraskans.

Amy Buresh, the Affiliate State President of the Nebraska Federation of the Blind of Nebraska was connected to this portion of the meeting via conference call.

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) works with consumer organizations in different ways. The primary organizations are:

1. Two national organizations – American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB).
2. Local chapters of those organizations – most don't have separate acronyms, but the ACB chapter in Omaha is called the Omaha Council of the Blind (OCB)
3. and the Omaha based consumer organization, Omaha Association of the Blind (OAB).

Several years ago, our agency gave grants to the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) for a computer lab program for senior blind; to the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN) and the ACB Omaha (OCB) chapter for a transportation program; and to the Visually Impaired Peer Support groups (VIPS) to hold state conferences. In addition, due to our structure with five members on the Board of Commissioners, one of whom is the designee from the NFBN and another a designee from the ACBN, there is ongoing communication and listening to consumers' concerns and suggestions.

NCBVI tries to involve the consumer groups as a part of our trainings to introduce them to clients so they are aware of this rich network of role models. We also utilize individuals from the consumer groups to present on various agency programs, including panels about employment, WAGES, PI, Winnerfest, FYI, GATE, SAILS, among other training events. Furthermore, at the college student workshops we partner with the Nebraska Association of Blind Students (NABS) to get presenters; and have blind students present on how they work with high institutions of learning, alternatives on taking notes, using readers, accessible books, technology, etc. Each referral is provided with a resource list in a format they prefer. The list includes other resources, as well as consumer organizations. We address so many things this helps people remember resources that are available to them. It lists the date and time of each consumer group meeting. Our counselors encourage clients to attend monthly meetings and will attend with them if they would like to be accompanied..

Three of our counselors did a demonstration over the past few months on Judo and One Touch for NFB, OCB, ACB, and OAB. Our Executive Director makes presentations and holds an open forum at different annual meetings of consumer organizations. Several of our staff members also gave presentations on other areas relating to blindness. We also have staff members who worked with parents to be on a parent panel at the NFBN convention. We work with the Share A Fare board to make referrals to the cab program in Omaha as a transportation option for consumers.

The Omaha district is also working with OAB, OCB, and NFB for a Show and Tell on technology scheduled to be held in November. We discuss NFB, AFB, and ACB

options for mentors and connecting with blind people around the country working in a particular vocation that is blind or visually impaired (Divisions, AFB CareerConnect, etc.). We use literature and publications from consumer organizations for clients/families to read and have as a resource. We support staff to attend the state conventions and/or national conventions.

The Omaha Council of the Blind is planning a summer activity for children/family in 2015. They asked if we could share ideas with them for this event. The NFB Omaha chapter recognizes employers during the month of October who hired individuals that are blind and visually impaired.

We discuss the presence of consumer groups with clients, especially when writing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) so we can include attendance at conventions if they are interested. Throughout their programs we discuss the benefits of being members of these groups and attending consumer events. We pay for the registration, hotel room, meals, and transportation to attend the convention of their choice for one time only. We also pass along information regarding consumer events to clients who may be interested. We also inform them of special programs such as NFB Newline and Radio Talking Book that may benefit them in their daily living activities.

All staff attend one state convention for each consumer group (NFB and ACB), ideally during their first year of employment. We also are generous in supporting staff attendance at consumer conventions both state and national yearly if they are interested. We collaborated this past year with the NFB NABS group to put on the college workshop in March, which many college students attended and benefitted from. Working with consumer groups to advocate and mentor clients is an integral part of our organization.

Our training Center staff and clients attend the ACBN and NFBN state conventions each year. The Center also brings in a representative from each consumer organization around the time of their state conventions to speak about their organizations. The Center also encourages clients to attend local chapter meetings of each of these consumer organizations.

Furthermore, the Technology Team collaborates with consumer organizations in a few key ways. First, when invited by organization leadership, the team's members will present seminars related to emerging technologies, apps, or other topics related to access technology. The team has also provided exhibit tables and hosted trainings at consumer organization conventions.

Individuals from the three main consumer organizations presented next.

Mark Bulger – President of OAB - Omaha Association of the Blind.

Mark stated that on behalf of the OAB, he appreciates the opportunity to be present at today's meeting. The OAB only exists in Omaha and it has been in existence for over 92 years. They were around before the consumer groups realized that they needed to

become consumer groups. When people get together and share common interests and goals great things can happen. In preparing for today's presentation, Mark stated that he took a look at the word collaboration. The definition that he likes is "the action of working together to produce something." Being blind 100 years ago is much different than it is today. This is because of the action of people working together with the services that are available to the public. With blind and visually impaired people, obstacles encountered are sometimes too difficult to encounter alone. It is good to have a support network. The mission of OAB is to promote social, intellectual and economic welfare of the blind and work towards their interests in general and to foster a feeling of fraternity and fellowship in the greater Omaha area. One of the best resources that the blind have in Nebraska and in Omaha is the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We are blessed that we have some caring people that truly do care about the blind and also have the skills necessary to help us live independently and help us get employment opportunities. OAB is concerned about the complete person, not just that they get a job. NCBVI is very critical for helping blind people find employment opportunities and obtain the necessary skills. NCBVI also works to help blind people live independently, which is very important. NCBVI also works with the older blind.

As a consumer organization, when he talks to people who are blind, sometimes they are new to blindness and they do not know what resources are available. In this case, he strongly encourages that they seek support and skills development through NCBVI. Mark states that he likes to think that each person has some unique circumstances and sometimes we have to think outside the box. All the consumer groups are working together to have a two day training to provide consumers with information regarding blindness tools and technology. This will expose consumers and help them to take the next step to get the independence that they desire.

Mark stated that he is pleased that NCBVI disperses information about OAB and other consumer groups so that people are aware of them. Mark stated that OAB cannot do everything for the blind, and neither can NCBVI. It is a matter of helping and encouraging each other. The goal is to have people live as independently as they so desire. Without NCBVI, this would be much more difficult. Mark noted that probably the biggest thing we can do as a consumer group is to encourage each other and the leaders of the organizations. The needs of the blind continually change as technology changes. The biggest challenge of the future is getting blind people the access to the information they need. Mark noted that he is pleased that NCBVI keeps up on this.

Dale Oviatt, Treasurer of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska – ACBN. Dale stated that Jim Jirak asked him to come to today's meeting to say a few words. Dale noted that he has not had contact with NCBVI in a long time, so he has no

personal stories to tell about that. His last contact with the agency was when it was the Services for the Visually Impaired. What he can say today is that his contacts with the employees of the Commission have all been positive. He appreciates the good work that the employees do and he feels comfortable that they represent NCBVI and that they are providing the services that they need to provide to the optimum that they can. Being a state agency, there may be some limitations in what NCBVI can do. NCBVI is trying to improve the situations for blind and visually impaired people and provide opportunities for employment. This is all very crucial. It is very important to be an independent person and to have had a fairly successful life. In his world, he was the only visually impaired person in the business that he was in and through many years of work, he rose through the ranks and was successful. It is important for young people to receive the tools that they need to go out into the world and be successful and not come back to the NCBVI. They need to be able to live their lives as independently as possible, make their living and pay their taxes. The only thing that blind people need to deal with is blindness; they can be successful in every other aspect of society. NCBVI has gone a long way to help young people to develop the skills to be successful. Dale thanked the NCBVI for everything it has accomplished through all of these years.

Chairperson Hansen asked Dale to talk about the family and youth event that is going to be held this summer and put on by the ACBN. Dale stated that as of now, this plan is simply an idea that they would like to accomplish sometime next summer. The details have not yet been worked out. What they would like to do is have a one-day outdoor activity for children who are visually impaired and their families. Beyond that concept, the details have not been worked out. They would certainly appreciate the assistance of NCBVI in helping them put on the event. There is nothing further to report today. By the February 2015 additional information should be available.

Amy Buresh – Affiliate President of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN). Amy thanked NCBVI for the opportunity to speak at today's meeting and she thanked Director Van Zandt for the accommodation of letting her participate via conference call.

The National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska is proud member of the National organization and they are a non-profit membership organization made up of consumers speaking for themselves. NFBN believes very much that blindness is not the characteristic that defines blind people or their future. Every day they strive to raise expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and their dreams. They believe that blind people can live the lives that they want and blindness is not what holds them back from living their dream. Blindness is simply a characteristic. They work together to raise hope and love in order to make

dreams a reality. This is what the NFBN strives to do and she believes that this mirrors the high expectation that NCBVI holds for consumers. It is the NFBN's pleasure to continue a partnership with the Commission. As a matter of fact, beginning in the middle to late 1990's they began working very hard, going to the legislature, raising funds and talking, to encourage the creation of a separate Commission for blind people. Who better to manage and understand the affairs of the blind than the blind themselves? This battle was won. NFBN has continued to work with NCBVI on various programs. The college workshop has been very successful as a partnership with the Nebraska Association of the Blind Students, continuing to participate in the State conventions and events. NFBN always appreciates Director Van Zandt coming to provide a chance for consumers to meet her and speak with her and for her to share updates on all the latest events happening at NCBVI. When the budget affecting the senior blind was impacted a few years ago, again they went to the legislature and were able to secure some funds so that NCBVI could do the much valued work that they do with blind seniors. NFBN thanks Director Van Zandt for leading the way and being a champion of NFB Newslines way back from its early inception and bringing it to Nebraska. Newslines is a great way to receive up-to-date news for blind people.

Amy stated that NFBN can serve as a resource for mentoring and work with Commission staff and clients in order to prepare consumers who are searching for role models for them in various aspects of their life. NFBN looks forward to working with Director Van Zandt and the rest of the Commission staff and consumers in the years to come. Dare to dream and dare to make it come true!

Chairperson Hansen asked if the NFBN has any plans for any collaboration in the near future with the NCBVI. Amy Buresh stated that there are always things that are being talked about. Amy noted that NFBN recently completed their state convention and there was some great collaboration that happened there. They had a very successful activity for blind youth and parents. NFBN does have some things that they have talked about and collaboration is always on-going.

Director Van Zandt asked if any of the speakers had anything else that they wish to add.

Mark Bulger stated that consumer groups are a group of people that are seeking informed choices and one of their roles as consumers is to encourage NCBVI to continue with the good job it is doing and to be on the leading edge as consumers. It is the consumer's job to let the Commission know what the consumer's' needs are. Consumers should help guide the direction of the Commission by coming to meetings and being engaged in discussions.

Commissioner Jirak stated for the record that Mark is absolutely right about consumer groups working together. One of the things he tried to communicate with Mr. Mark Riccobono, the newly elected President of the National Federation of the Blind, when he met him a few weeks ago was the concept of strength in numbers. Commissioner Jirak noted that he did not do a very good job with this conversation; however, there is strength in numbers. He stated that everyone in the room knows that the ACB and NFB consumer organizations do not always agree. Having said that, they do agree in certain areas on certain things and there is strength in numbers. They need to find something they can agree on and make it happen. You are only going to get somewhere if you have a mass voice behind you beating the drum for what you want. It is better to work together to get what you want.

Director Van Zandt thanked all the speakers from the three consumer organizations for contributing to today's meeting. Director Van Zandt stated that she goes to meetings where directors from around the country are in attendance and there are some who firmly believe that they should not even have the pamphlets for the organizations in their offices. NCBVI is completely the opposite. We believe that it is very important to have that two-way communication. This is what we believe in and this is what we do.

Chairperson Hansen thanked Mark, Dale and Amy for helping out with today's Focus Topic. He knows that we will all be able to do some great things together in the future.

Public Comment

Cindy White – Cindy stated that as a consumer and a member of the Omaha Association of the Blind (OAB), she wants to say that as a consumer late in the game to blindness, being sighted for most of her 53 years. She became blind in her 30's and at that time she was not very happy. She now realizes some of the wonderful things she might have gotten from the Commission had it not been for her own denial and anger about her blindness. It took her a while to realize that there was more for her and that she could be independent; however, she did not know any other blind people. Most of her friends, until the last couple of years, had all been sighted. She lived in a sighted head, but battled with blindness in her own space trying to get new legs. Once she heard about OAB she knew that there were other blind people out there. She realized that OAB may have answers for her that she did not have for herself. As a consumer, she was late in the game to blindness and she almost admits a tinge of jealousy for those who are blind at birth in that there would have been training available to her at the Commission as a blind person from birth. As someone who is older and became blind at a later age, it was difficult for her to lay down her old ideas of the differences between the sighted world and her blind world. She had to learn to embrace a new way to live. Because of OAB, she was exposed to very successful, happy and exciting blind people and she also got her "blind legs" and she became much more active. She also made some friends with people who were so much like her. As a consumer in Nebraska, she feels we are very blessed. There are several, very good, well-grounded organizations in Nebraska that are helping the blind people.

Director Van Zandt thanked Cindy for her statements.

Chairperson Hansen noted that he had a question for Director Van Zandt. As a part of the materials that the Board was sent prior to today's meeting, she sent to them some Resource Packets. Each packet is semi-customized for the District offices. The Board received one packet of North Platte District Resources and one packet of Omaha District Resources. Chairperson Hansen asked if the Lincoln District also has a packet of Resources that they hand out. Director Van Zandt stated that she believes that they do, but she has not seen it. Commissioner Hansen requested that the Board be sent a copy of the packet for the Lincoln District Resources. Director Van Zandt stated that she will check into getting the Board a copy of the Lincoln District packet. Director Van Zandt noted that these are living documents and they need to be updated and changes are made.

Barbara Loos – Barbara stated that her question has to do with what is the Commission's procedure for asking for information so there can be the potential of consistent availability of information. For instance, the agency calendar has some information for OAB meeting dates and there is some information about conventions of organizations listed. Since we are talking about collaboration, how are these responsibilities handled from the position of NCBVI in terms of requesting information and offering opportunities for it so there is the potential of information being out there. If a solicitation is done once, then maybe information happens. Some of the responsibility goes to the different organizations to keep their information up to date. Then when people go to their links from the NCBVI website, the information will be correct. There can be a lot of confusion as to whose role is what. Barbara noted that she was not aware of the District Resource packets and she asked if this is an internal thing.

Director Van Zandt reported that the sheet is a District Resource list that counselors use in providing information to particularly new referrals, but also to other people who are asking for information. The resource does need to be updated. As far as the NCBVI website, and the agency calendar, a while back the Board decided that it would be a good thing to have a place to put information regarding when organizations are holding their meetings. In order to have the information posted on the NCBVI calendar, the organizations need to provide this information to us. The advantage is that people can look at the calendar and see what is going on in their area. The disadvantage is that something might be missed or something may need to be changed at the last minute and it may not get on the calendar. Kathy will check on the NCBVI website links to organizations in Nebraska to see if they are up to date.

Chairperson Hansen asked who they should contact if there is an event that an organization would like NCBVI to put on their calendar. These requests should go to Kathy Stephens, 402.471.8101 or kathy.stephens@nebraska.gov.

Chairperson Hansen stated that in our conversations this morning it sounds like there are probably three main areas where organization may want to remember that the

Commission has information about them and they may want to check in once in a while to make sure it is up-to-date. They should check the website calendar, the information in the District Resource packets and also any pamphlets or brochures that may be in the Commission offices. The Commission would appreciate it if consumer organizations would take an active role in making sure that the information that we have on hand to distribute is accurate.

Break – A break was taken at 10:15 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:30 a.m.

Commissioner's Report

Chairperson Hansen reported that this past quarter he spent time getting ready for the NFBN Convention which was held in October. As a part of the convention he gives an update about NCBVI.

Chairperson Hansen noted that he had a few opportunities in Lincoln to talk to consumers and staff members to hear some thoughts that they have about NCBVI and what is going on today and services being offered. Some of the discussions were coincidental and some of them were scheduled. When you are on the NCBVI Board of Commissioners you are always a commissioner because you do not know who you are going to run into.

NCBVI has been looking at a new client management system for the past year or so and it is moving forward. The possibility of purchasing the system had to go before the Nebraska Information Technology Commission for a review process. Chairperson Hansen stated that he had the unique opportunity to attend this meeting last week and he learned more about that process which was very enlightening.

Commissioner Newman stated that he attended the Fall State Staff meeting in Kearney. Commissioner Newman noted that he thinks it is important for the commissioners to be represented at the State Staff meeting.

Commissioner Newman reported that because he is a former employee and because he has some skills that can be of value to NCBVI he worked as an instructor at an adult training program which was held at Mahoney State park. A couple of weeks ago he was also a moderator for a couple of panels for an employment workshop for Omaha consumers. One of the panels was composed of employed blind individuals and the other was of organizations that have jobs for blind individuals. Commissioner Newman stated that he also talked about the Nebraska Business Enterprise Program.

Commissioner Jirak stated that last week he participated in the Omaha office sponsored Employment Skills Program Nebraska (ESPN) workshop. This was a program for individuals looking for work. It covered resume writing and other valuable information.

Commissioner Jirak reported that he participated on a panel regarding employment for blind individuals. He also attended Friday evening of the NFBN convention and he had a chance to say hello to Mark Riccobono.

Commissioner Jirak also saw the redesign on the Omaha's Share a Fare website which is now more functional. He also reported that he will participate in the Outlook Nebraska banquet on November 7 representing ACB.

Commissioner Rieken reported that she went to a NFB Lincoln Chapter fundraiser at the Saltdogs game. Here she ran into a student from Project Independence and she introduced her to her daughter. Commissioner Rieken attended the HIMS College Workshop at NCBVI a few weeks ago. It was good to learn about some new technology.

Commissioner Rieken attended the NFBN State Convention in Omaha. She also visited with Mark Riccobono at the convention as well as students and parents.

Commissioner Johnson reported that she attended the NFBN State Convention in Omaha. This was a very good convention and it gave her a chance to connect with a lot of people that she had not seen for a while. She heard some good things about how NCBVI is affecting people's lives and giving them the skills to advocate for themselves. The enthusiasm was great.

Commissioner Johnson noted that this past week she attended a three day conference in Kearney for another Drug and Alcohol prevention group that she works with. Going into the workshop she did not think it would have any relevance to her role as a commissioner as they were talking about the strategic prevention framework. On the last day of the conference everything clicked for her and she saw how what she learned was useful for everything. It was a neat way of looking at what you do from a logical perspective and doing it in a logical order and then doing your evaluation based on your assessment to see if you are making progress. This helps her in her report reading.

Chairperson Hansen thanked all the commissioners for their reports.

Report from the Executive Director

Director Van Zandt introduced the new Omaha employees. Monique Orrante is the new VR technician and Tim Jefferson is the new VR Counselor. Tim just completed his four month Center training on October 31.

The last week in October, Governor Heineman honored Shane Buresh as NCBVI Employee of the Year and Sarah Stewart as NCBVI Supervisor of the year. Congratulations to Shane and Sarah!

Adrienne Moody is new as our VR Tech in Kearney. Carol Jenkins was promoted to Center Supervisor. Kim Schnitzer has been hired to fill Carol's position; she will start at the end of November. More details of staff changes are in the HR section, below.

During the past quarter, I continued meetings with the Leadership Team, Admin Team, Dr. Stelter, Lincoln/Lancaster Multicultural Advisory Committee, budget analysts, NCBVI

supervisors and staff (including State Staff and North Platte District Meetings), Nebraska State agency directors, OCIO people on various technology issues and projects, conference calls and webinars with federal entities and national organizations, as well as state based including technology issues.

Our annual State Plan was revised, per guidance from Rehab Services Administration (RSA). The plan has now been officially approved by RSA.

Our relocation request for Lincoln District, the Center, and Administrative offices is still in process with State of Nebraska Administrative Services Building Division. We now have a finalized Request for Bids (RFB). Soon a meeting will be scheduled for potential Vendors to learn more about our needs and to submit bids. The Release Request for Proposal will be published in the Lincoln Journal Star on November 5 and November 12, 2014. A Mandatory Pre-Bid Meeting will be held on November 19 at 4600 Valley Road, Conference Room 4A. The last date to submit written questions after the Pre-Proposal meeting is December 10. The State will respond to written questions by December 11. The Bid Opening will be December 17 at 4600 Valley Road, Conference Room 4A. The Contract Award date is January 30, 2015 and the tenant Agency date of occupancy is to be no later than September 30, 2015.

The Fall Statewide Staff Meeting was held in Kearney. A key focus was sharing ideas with each other for teaching and counseling techniques – recognizing and taking advantage of the vast internal resources that exist within our own staff members. The meeting went well and was a good learning opportunity for all NCBVI staff members.

We submitted the agency's Biennium Budget Request as required by the September 15 deadline. The technology project to obtain the AWARE client services database software is a part of our Biennium plan. It had to be submitted as a separate "Enterprise Request" and is now going through a process for approval from the Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC). The NITC met October 28; our project was approved. We continue to communicate with the company and with OCIO to determine best ways to proceed.

The Single State Audit of NCBVI is in process. We have completed everything required; the final audit report will be forthcoming.

The Braille Authority of North America has set a new course for the use of Braille. Effective January 4, 2016, the Braille code used will be UEB, Unified English Braille. We are beginning to look at how to prepare our staff, especially the counselors, to transition to the new code. Besides training plans, we will also need to purchase Instruction Books which teach the new code, for counselors to use with clients.

We are exploring a source for Self Employment Services, to educate clients interested in self-employment and to strengthen the expertise of Counselors, as well. An organization has been used by Nebraska General VR for many years, which has been highly effective for them. We have met with the Abilities Fund program staff to explore possibilities for NCBVI.

Field Services

During Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014), we served 942 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Seventy two (72) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Fifty six (56) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, transfers to another agency, unable to locate, disability too significant to benefit from VR, and other).

In the Independent Living (IL) track, 665 clients were served, in all statuses. Two hundred forty nine (249) were closed successfully, with seven (7) transferring to VR services; thirty four (34) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons).

Nebraska Center for the Blind

Here are the center's quarterly highlights from August through October:

- County Fair: Two Center Clients entered exhibits into the Lancaster County Fair this year. One client entered an applesauce cake. He won a First Place Blue Ribbon. Another client entered a felted dog with a red collar and bone. She won a Second Place Red Ribbon for her Toto!
- 3 clients had Three Day Stays and a fourth will have a Three Day Stay at the end of October
- 2 Clients Started Center Training
- 4 clients graduated from center training and one staff trainee completed center training.
- Tours: The state building division, Madonna Rehabilitation Staff, State Procurement, Union College Staff and Students, and 2 clients toured. Later this month the new Director of the UNL Vision Program will tour. The South Carolina Commission for the Blind also came to observe and learn about how our training center works so they can implement things we do in Nebraska in South Carolina.
- Center Activities: Clients went to Hu Hot to work on buffet skills, Gateway Mall for a scavenger hunt to work on orientation skills, played accessible games, participated in the White Cane Day Proclamation Ceremony, went to the Capitol Cafeteria to work on tray carrying and cafeteria skills, and clients participated in a technology demonstration by Freedom Scientific. In October the center will also attend the NFBN convention as well as carve pumpkins and have a soup luncheon to work on soup skills.
- The Bryan Nursing Students come several times each semester to work on expanding their diversity and understanding of low vision and blindness through

the use of alternative techniques and the capabilities of blind and low vision individuals.

- The Nebraska Center for the Blind was recertified by the National Blindness Professionals Certification Board through September 9, 2017. We scored a 96%
- The Nebraska Center for the Blind is going to have a retreat at the end of October to work on a new schedule, curriculum changes, and policies.
- Several staff participated in One Touch Self Defense Training, Life Coach Training, Train the Trainer, FYI, the Mahoney Group Teaching, and the Yarn Workshop.

Field Services by District

North Platte District by Sarah Stewart

The North Platte District was glad to welcome a new staff member this quarter. Adrienne Moody began her position as part time vocational rehabilitation technician in the Kearney office on August 26th. Adrienne is a student at UNK studying pre-med. We are glad to have her join our team.

Staff was busy with many new referrals, attending fall IEP's and helping students prepare for their fall semesters in college. Angie Hoff spent a good portion of her time in July and August in Lincoln assisting her NBE client with starting a cafeteria at the Joint Forces Base in Lincoln. Angie brought her experience managing restaurants to the table but there was still a great deal to learn and work out in accordance with military regulations. Angie and Don Ward worked a lot of long days to ensure the vendor had everything in place to successfully open her business on August 25th. Thanks to Angie, Don, and everyone else who assisted for all your hard work to provide this client with such an awesome opportunity.

Staff attended our Fall State Staff meeting on September 1st and 2nd which was held at the Holiday Inn in Kearney. The first day was focused on "Sharing Our Best" alternatives and teaching techniques for technology and home management as well as working with clients with secondary disabilities. Support staff attending specialized training provided by Bill Brown and Dave Robinson. Staff reported these trainings the first day were interesting and informative.

We had our FYI/CORE training in North Platte on September 15-19th. We had 8 clients participate, 6 OIB and 2 VR. This is the largest group we've had in some time. It was a diverse and lively group and we had a very successful program. Cindy Zimmer worked FYI with us and it was great to have her join our team and share her knowledge. Deanna Jesse worked with staff from Lincoln and Omaha to coordinate a group teaching the following week, September 22-25th, at Mahoney State Park. It sounds like it was a great training as well.

Jamie Forbis and Scott Pavelka from the North Platte office provided two in-service trainings to Lincoln County employees on September 25th. Their contact there generated a lot of interest and some referrals for services and further trainings. I participated on a panel discussion about disabilities in the community to students in the Central Community College Occupational Therapy Assistant program.

We met for our Annual District Meeting on October 1 and 2nd in Kearney. Dr. Van Zandt, Carlos Servan, Bill Brown and Wes Majerus joined our team. Kris Thaller provided her 1 day life coaching training which got very positive responses from the group. The second day was spent reviewing district business and reports from administration. As always we enjoyed the opportunity to get together as a team.

Deanna and Sherrie are working on coordinating a Yarn Workshop for clients who would like to learn more about alternatives for knitting, crocheting, and various other yarn crafts. It will be held in Kearney on October 21st.

Dottie Wilmott is providing training to staff on eForce enhancements and updated RSA reporting the end of October.

We had three successful closures this quarter including Agricultural Worker (Bee keeper), Job Retention for a Randolph-Sheppard Vendor, and Counselor.

Omaha District Highlights November 2014 by Nancy Flearl

I always start to write the same thing. Where has the time gone? It is so very busy, never a dull moment for sure.

Carol Jenkins left us to start her new position as the Supervisor for the Nebraska Center for the Blind. We had a going away ice cream social on her behalf. With her departure we have posted the position and held interviews October 7th and 8th. We had 55 applicants for this position.

We have added back a part-time position and held interviews October 3rd and had only 20 applicants.

Tim Jefferson the VR counselor hired to replace Monica Tripp is attending the meeting along with our VR Tech Monique Orrante.

We had Dr. Karen Wolffe provide training in vocational counseling and placement for transition age students in April. The focus of the training was on Pre-Employment Skills. Making sure that the client has the skills and is a good match for the job. We will

complete a group vocational training on October 28th, with the final day the consumers will attend a job fair.

We have a few consumers attending the NFBN state convention. Some of the Omaha staff have been asked to assist with a Parent Workshop on Friday. They have recommended some resources that would be good for IEP/Parents rights, etc.

We are working with the Omaha Association for the Blind to do a technology show and tell and IL skills workshop. People that want to know about accessible phones. Pro's and Con's of Tablets and IPADS, etc. We are looking at mid-November to take a day or so for people to come in and learn about what is available.

We have had staff participate in a group teaching at Mahoney where 13 clients were scheduled to work on intensive skills. We had consumers from Lincoln, Omaha and North Platte Districts. The feedback was really positive on what they all gained from the experience.

We did provide training to some of the staff in Windows 8. We will do a follow up with the rest of the staff in the near future.

We started the Omaha Steaks box job on October 6th. We will have 10 clients working this project.

We had a couple of people get jobs Sales Associate full time at Walmart and full time production worker. We are working with Metro Area Placement Professionals and will hold a job fair on October 28th 20+ employers with a focus on customer service.

I have had dialogue with a consulting company that represents several businesses that want to open call centers and are interested in learning about accessibility, equipment, and potential candidates. This is in its infancy but holds promise for a wonderful partnership.

We are working with the remodeling our computer lab and are continuing to work with the building division about the remodeling of our Kitchen.

Lincoln District by Connie Daly

This quarter a couple of staff attended the NFB convention. We had a number of staff attend training in Baltimore for technology. Eric Buckwalter attended training provided to the Omaha District about job seeking activities that was presented by Karen Wolff. The VR counselors in my district are attending a program this week in which they will

implement some of the training that they received. Our thanks to the Omaha District for arranging this.

We don't have GATE any longer so we planned a joint program with the Omaha district that took place at Mahoney. We had 5 participants from Lincoln and six people from Omaha attend. They worked on Braille, Cane Travel, Homemaking, technology and crafts.

We provided Life Coach training for job seekers on Aug. 18th and 19th. We had ten job seekers attend. We also had eight clients work with Cindy Kailiff to develop resumes and letters of inquiry.

We increased our placements of blind people by 35%. I am very proud of my team for this accomplishment. We have been short staffed for most of the year but we were still able to improve our service delivery. I want to thank the Business Advisory Council for their support. Our clients developed a lot more confidence by being able to interact with the Council; their interest in clients' success had a big impact.

Here is a list of the types of jobs our clients got.

Plant and Soil Scientist, Custodian, Landlord, Vendor, Self-employed Quilter, Mental Health Counselor, Writing Coach, Vendor, Research Surveyor, Juvenile Diversion Coordinator, Cashier, Housekeeper, Vocational Rehab Technician, Massage Therapist, Laundry Worker, Office Support Worker, Telephone Surveyor, Restaurant Cook, Automotive Technician, Vendor, Science Teacher, Customer Service Representative, Dishwasher, Elementary School Teacher, and Research Surveyor.

Thank you everyone for a great year!

Business Office - Bill Brown

Federal Single Audit
Lincoln Building Relocation Work
Biennium Budget Preparation and Submission
Agency Staffing
Agency Reorganization
Processing AWARE procurement
Agency Long Term Financial Planning
LB 429 Log
Agency Business Process Discussions

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

Nurtured my fractured hand as it healed.
Working on Surplus of items (Staging Area and 4th Floor Storage Room)

Turned in Year End Fixed Asset Report the end of August.

Attended State Staff Meeting in Kearney.

Completed Registrations and Hotel Arrangements for Staff and clients attending the NFB-N Convention.

Did travel arrangements for several staff attending various training events. (Train the Trainers in Baltimore, MD; CSAVR/NCSAB in Miami, FL; BLAST Conference in San Antonio, TX; National Rehabilitation Association Conference in Des Moines, IA)

HR Quarterly Highlights – Dave Robinson

1. Adrienne Moody was hired August 26th, into the recently created part-time Voc. Rehab. Technician position in the Kearney office.
2. Carol Jenkins was promoted to the Training Center Supervisor position, effective September 2nd.
3. The Voc. Rehab. Counselor II position vacated by Carol Jenkins, as a result of her promotion, was advertised and 51 applications were received. The interview pool consisted of 7 Candidates and interviews were conducted on October 10, 2014.
4. State Personnel approved creation of a part-time Voc. Rehab. Technician position in Omaha. The job was posted and 20 applications were received. Nancy Flearl has decided to defer hiring for the time being and will re-open the position in a few months.
5. Due to the increasing workload for Stephanie Wagle's position, we have requested to increase her FTE from .5 (20 hours per week) to .63 (25 hours per week).

Technology Program Board Highlights by Wes Majerus

A number of activities have taken place over the past quarter for the technology Program. I continue to attend district and office meetings to keep staff apprised of new developments and to learn how activities are occurring in the field. The Tech Team and I held two meetings during the quarter. The first was in conjunction with the State Staff Meeting, and focused primarily on questions surrounding the Agency Restructuring and roles and responsibilities of tech specialists in their district teams. We also discussed topics such as the need for Windows 8 training in all districts, demoed the KNFB Reader app and Blue2 Switch, reviewed procedures for purchasing technology, and discussed the new iOS 8 operating system.

Another area of focus this quarter was the 2015-2017 biennial budget process. The IT plan was drafted and submitted. Because we are planning to procure a new client tracking system, an IT Project Proposal needed to be drafted. I worked on this along with Pearl and Bill, and it was submitted along with the budget. Recently, we received the initial feedback on the project from the Nebraska Information Technology Commission. We were provided the opportunity to send a response to our proposal; this has been completed and sent to the NITC.

The Omaha District serves a large number of students and clients whose technology needs are quite diverse. I was asked to train counselors in the district in the use of Windows 8 because it was being encountered frequently on Omaha District caseloads. Larry Oleson, Omaha Tech Specialist and I, held the training on September 30. The primary goal of the training was to give counselors some familiarity with Windows 8 and to show that once some key concepts were learned, the operating system can be used as efficiently as prior Windows versions. I believe that we achieved this goal as the trainees came away feeling more comfortable with Windows 8 and asked pertinent questions.

Other areas of focus have included:

- Providing assistance to the Executive Director and Business manager in drafting RFP requirements for possible Lincoln office move.
- Support network difficulties with wireless networks statewide and wired networks in Lincoln.
- Assist with office of the CIO changes to networks in Lincoln.
- Test iOS 8 for compatibility with Agency/State processes.

Chairperson Hansen noted that in report a reference was made to the GATE program and that it is not being offered anymore. Chairperson Hansen inquired as to what happened to GATE. Director Van Zandt reported that this year they decided to do a combined training with other offices which was mentioned in the report as well. This combined training was held at Mahoney State Park. Director Van Zandt stated that there was a feeling that there were fewer people who could really benefit from GATE so they wanted to do the broader geographic approach this year. GATE has not necessarily been forever eliminated. It is possible for the GATE program to resurface at some time.

Nancy Flearl reported that the North Platte District still held an FYI as the District is a huge geographic area. What they found was rather than having a set time for SAILS or GATE, if we have a combination of older blind and VR clients we will cater training for the group. The combined training that they held was great and she feels that people got a lot out of it. People have mentioned the benefit of the peer support.

Director Van Zandt reported that the Omaha office brought in Dr. Karen Wolfe who is an expert on employment and vocational counseling, especially for transition age. The Omaha counselors as well as one counselor from Lincoln participated in her training. The new WIOA has a huge emphasis on transition and pre-employment transition services. Even though NCBVI has always been strong on transition services for years, we are ramping up even more so.

Commissioner Newman stated that all these updates are always good to hear and they are needed. Recently when he participated in the workshop that was mentioned earlier about employment, Connie Daly was here to see how the program was set up and how it was working. He learned from Connie that the Employment Club that they had going on recently ceased. Sometimes a new approach is needed for consumers and staff. It is nice to hear about the District updates.

Nancy Flearl reported that the program that Dr. Karen Wolfe presented to them was about pre-employment skills. The materials she used were developed in Maine and were originally presented in British Columbia. Therefore, they had to take a lot of the material and customize it for NCBVI. Having clients get the pre-employment skills helps get them invested right from the beginning. They have to come in and set their goals and write particulars about their job search and their job goals, etc. Starting with younger people may be beneficial, but as a whole it is going to be good. We are looking to have this program also be held in the Lincoln and North Platte Districts.

Unfinished Business

Budget and Biennium Update

Director Van Zandt noted that they spoke in depth about the budget at the August Commission Board meeting because the NCBVI biennium request was due on September 15. We requested level funding from the state for us to continue. We have received some requests for additional information from the budget analyst. There are two budget analysts, one in the legislature and one in the Governor's office. We communicate with both of them and they send us questions and we go from there. This is in process. After submitting our level funding request we learned more about the WIOA, and the federal people in the rehab services administration are in the process of trying to figure out how WIOA will impact the federal grants for vocational rehab. Director Van Zandt and Business Manager Bill Brown attended a webinar recently and are beginning to learn more about what will be involved. With the increase requirement, not just increased emphasis but actual mandate in that we must spend 15% at least of our Voc. Rehab. funds on transition and specifically pre-employment and of our supported employment funds, we must spend 50% of those on transition. Of all of this part of our budget, none of it can be administration. Therefore, we need to increase the abilities of our counselors to deliver direct services as well as manage the whole program effectively. There is a step in the process that agencies can submit a deficit budget request and this is due November 15. There has to be a good reason to request these funds. NCBVI is going to request state funding for a Transition employee. This one FTE will enable us to do this transition and pre-employment transition services. NCBVI will need to make sure we abide by new federal guidelines. This is in the works and needs to be completed by November 15. (NOTE: following the meeting, we discovered that the deadline had been changed to October 22; a request for additional funding will not be made this year).

The commissioners thanked Director Van Zandt for the budget report.

NFB Newsline® Update

October 30, 2014

Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Happy Halloween! Ghosts and goblins have been haunting Newsline this quarter, but hopefully we've extracted them for good! It was discovered earlier this month that voice mails weren't being forwarded to my E-mail. Several messages had gone left unanswered over the summer. The problem was resolved and I will be checking the voice mail box weekly to insure it doesn't happen again. The national office in Baltimore has also had some problems with their reporting website, hints the delay in this report. Hopefully those issues have also been resolved.

This past quarter I had the privilege of speaking to participants of the For Your Independence program in North Platte as well as the annual state convention of the NFB of Nebraska. In Addition I'm working with staff in Baltimore to change the wording on letters sent to new and existing subscribers. This will lend a more personal message giving subscribers information pertinent to Nebraska.

Nationally several new publications have been added this past quarter and are as follows: In August ESPN Online was added to the Breaking News category. ESPN, the magazine, can still be found under the magazine category, but ESPN Online gives sporting fans the latest news in the sporting community. Also added in August was The Greenville News out of South Carolina, the Journal News out of White Plains New York and the Reno gazette Journal out of Nevada. These publications can be accessed under option 5 from the main menu.

In September the two new publications added under option 5 were the Palladium Item out of Indiana and the Staunton News Leader out of Virginia. The UPI RSS was added under the Breaking News category. This is an enhanced version of the UPI publication and provides hourly updates.

October saw the addition of five new publications. Adding to the International publications are the Montreal Gazette, the Vancouver Sun and the Daily News Egypt. The newest Spanish publication is the El Diario out of New York. Finally added is the Mother Jones magazine published monthly. So don't be a scaredy-cat and check out all the new publications.

Let's fall back to the warmer months of July, August and September for some Bootaful stats!

July began the quarter with 1,762 subscribers in Nebraska. Over the next three months 15 more were added with 11 in July and 4 in September. No new subscribers were added in August, but existing subscribers were still busy scaring up snacks, oh, I mean stats.

Nebraska subscribers called into NFB-Newsline® via their land line or cell phone using the local number 42.69% of the time in July, 47.90% in August and 42.08% of the time in September. All other calls were made through the toll-free number. Subscribers read a total of 14,355 minutes of content on Newsline in July, 16,078 in August and 13,932 in September.

Subscribers also accessed NFB-Newsline® online 867 times in July, 1,616 times in August and 1,466 times in September. In July 581 E-Mails were sent with content to subscribers, 607 in August and 615 in September. The mobile app was used 172 times in July, 205 in August, 192 in September. In Your Pocket Deliveries in July 309, in August 517 and in September 801.

In July Nebraska newspapers were accessed 1,611 times, the local channel 78 times and local weather and emergency alerts 166 times. Also in July the TV Listings were accessed 501 times, National and International Newspapers 591 times, and Magazines 71 times. In August the Nebraska papers were accessed 1,987 times, the local channel 86 and local weather and emergency alerts 182. The TV Listings were accessed 506 times, National and International news 167 and magazines 90 times. Finally in September the Nebraska papers were accessed 2,197 times, the local channel 90 and local weather and emergency alerts 209. TV Listings accessed in September were 590, National and International papers 688 and magazines 82 times.

So, as you can see no cob webs are setting into the categories or subscribers of NFB-Newsline®. This concludes my quarterly report. Please call or E-mail with any questions. I hope you have a spookacular meeting!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) by Victoria Rasmussen

There are no CAP cases to report.

The CAP Director has met with the new Center Supervisor to plan CAP training for new staff and clients. She will meet individually with staff trainees toward the end of their Center training. CAP will meet with Center students soon after they come to the Center and again shortly before their training ends.

Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update

On September 19 and 20 the NBE retreat was held in Grand Island. We had ten vendors and two prospective ones. Kevan Worley, the national representative for the National Association of Blind Merchants and Dan Sipple from the Randolph Sheppard Vendors of America came to the retreat and provided information about their organizations as well as training opportunities for blind entrepreneurs.

During the Committee of Blind Vendors meeting on September 19 before the retreat, all the vendors voted to put the unassigned money into their retirement plan. This is the funds collected from third party contracts where we could not find blind managers.

The Committee also found a new financial planner who will manage their investment for their retirement plans. This will help to get more blind vendors signed into a retirement plan.

The Committee of Blind Vendors agreed in their June meeting to reduce the set-aside rate from 12.00% to 11.5% from the net of each vendor's income.

We were awarded the USA Joint Forces Canteen in Lincoln. We sent all the insurance requirements and met with them on July 22 to go over few final procedures. Antoinette Cervantes started operating this facility in August 18. Antoinette is still in training and should become certified as a licensed vendor in the next few weeks. Angie Hoff, VR Counselor in our Scottsbluff office and Don Ward, NBE Program Specialist in our Lincoln office, worked very hard with the client to make everything happen.

We are getting a new small site at the VR satellite offices in Omaha and will be added to one of the current vendors in that area early in November. It will be part of an existing route.

We are still waiting for approval on a future contract with the VA Hospital in Lincoln.

We have been offered new vending permits with The TSA (airport) in Lincoln and Grand Island. This is only for a couple of machines in each building and very few employees.

We have sent a permit for a new location with Dept. of Agriculture office in North Platte to open soon. This building will also have only a few vending machines to serve few federal employees.

Update on the I-80 rest area project. We started to replace the Pop machines. However, we are still waiting from the manufacturer to make the new ADA compliant snacks machines.

We are exploring the idea to contract with a business specialist to help our blind vendors grow their business.

Carlos Serván, Jan Stokebrand, and five vendors will attend the BLAST conference at the end of November in Texas.

Public Comment

Barbara Epworth – Barb asked what the reason is for wanting to move the Nebraska Center for the Blind.

Director Van Zandt explained that the Lincoln offices include the Training Center, the Lincoln District and the Statewide Administration offices. The Lincoln offices have been at the 4600 Valley Road location for approximately 18 years. We are looking to relocate to a place that is more modern and on a good bus route. What spurred the effort was when we had a flood in the building approximately 1 ½ years ago. At this time there were issues with mold and other damage.

The Center apartments are located downtown and we are not looking into moving them at this time. At some point we may look at moving the clients to different apartments, but at the moment we will keep them where they are.

Cindy White – Cindy asked what the acronym GATE stands for. Also, is everything that happens at today's meeting on some type of electronic media? Does this include the complete reports, etc.?

Chairperson Hansen reported that the entire NCBVI Commission Board meeting is being recorded and it will be placed on the NCBVI website as an audio file. The written minutes of the meeting will also be posted to the website. Included in the Minutes will be the full Executive Director's Report and all other reports that were discussed during the meeting today.

Director Van Zandt noted that the acronym GATE stands for Gain Alternative Techniques and Experience. Also discussed earlier were the acronym's FYI and SAILS. FYI stands for For Your Independence and SAILS stands for Senior Adventures in Independent Living Skills.

Break

A break was taken at 11:45 a.m. The meeting resumed at 12:00 noon.

Report from Dr. Nancy Stelter
Organizational Development Report
Submitted by: Dr. Nancy Stelter
November 1, 2014

New Organizational Structure:

The new organizational structure, endorsed by the Board in August, appears to have increased the efficiency of the agency. The agency continues with a participatory management style, but in a more orderly fashion. Employees have a clear understanding of exactly who they report to and who they should speak with regarding planning, problems and questions. The elimination of dual supervision has assisted in

that understanding. A comment was made at our last meeting that "things are busier but easier."

The change of Bob Deaton to the Planning/Human Resources position has given employees someone to go to who is not directly in their supervisory chain of command. This change has also relieved Bill Brown of human resources duties, and freed him up to focus more on finance.

The change of title of the Center Director from Director to Center Supervisor, reporting to the Deputy Director, Carlos Servan instead of the Agency Director seems to have negated the perception that position was at a higher level than the District Supervisors. This appears to have fostered greater teamwork amongst the supervisors. The addition of Carol Jenkins as the Center Supervisor has also had a positive impact. In the Kearney area, the change of the Statewide Older Blind Services Coordinator's supervision to the District Supervisor has opened up some possibilities to more efficiently serve clients of that area. Care is being taken by that District Supervisor to assure that position is available to serve the entire state, and has taken steps to coordinate this with all District Supervisors.

Leadership Team

The new Leadership Team, consisting of Dr. Pearl VanZandt, Bob Deaton, Carlos Servan and Bill Brown, has been meeting regularly. This collective decision making seems to have enhanced the communication and trust level throughout the agency. They have all been working diligently to assure that they do not negate each other's decisions and continue to reinforce the "chain of command" commitment.

Committee to Review the Billing and HR functions

This committee reviewed the billing and HR functions. Counselors, who participated, identified that more training on how to code purchase orders and a better understanding of billing other state entities and private vendors would be helpful. Additionally, they determined that a template letter should be developed for counselors to send to a vendor explaining the attachments needed for their bill.

This group also seemed to enhance communication. Dave Robinson emphasized that if a vendor has a question, counselors should feel free to call him or have the vendor call him. As a result of these discussions, it was determined that a training session would be held at State Staff meeting to review purchase orders, the differences in billing state organizations and private vendors, etc. Dave Robinson developed the training with the

help of Cheryl Livingston. This training was delivered to groups, as applicable, at the State Staff meeting in September and was well received by all participants.

Counselor Training Program

A more defined training program for new counselors and opportunity for reviews for current counselors, was one of the requests during the assessment. Bob Deaton had been working on a training program. With the change of supervisory duties, he now has more time to dedicate to this project. This training will be provided in the on-boarding process with each new hire and will be provided by request from District Supervisors.

Planning Function

Bob Deaton officially taking the responsibility for the Planning Function seems to have very definitively positioned the responsibility for reports. At the last Administrative Meeting, it was also determined that he would be responsible for the Annual Agency Report to the Governor.

Center

The Center Staff have been working on new processes to enhance client training, client motivation as well as enhancing teamwork with the Field Staff. They have clarified the intake process, the advisement process, reports to Field Counselors, and completion reports. They have all reviewed their individual programs to assess if there would be changes that would greater benefit the clients.

Performance Evaluations

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt has communicated to all supervisors that they need to assure that all employee performance evaluations are completed in a timely fashion. There had been some confusion in the past as the State's form is inaccessible. The Leadership team decided that it was more important to have regular evaluations than it was to wait until the form could be made accessible. Thus, it was decided that, for time being, they would continue to use the agency's internal accessible form which has been used previously.

Comments

The entire project seems to have fostered a culture of collegiality throughout the agency. It was noted that at the Statewide Staff meeting, there appeared to be no

gossiping and complaining. The Leadership Team said that it seems like employees have a more vested interest. Throughout the project, the theme has been "you can only be responsible for your own behavior" and the goal here is to "provide the best services possible for the blind and visually impaired." Discussions have also been held that there will always be issues and problems in any organization but communicating and cooperating will always be the best approach.

This concludes the report.

Commissioner Jirak thanked Dr. Nancy Stelter for her good work. Commissioner Johnson inquired about the time frame for the final wrap up of her work on the NCBVI Organizational Structure. Dr. Stelter stated that she would be completed hopefully by the end of 2014. Dr. Stelter noted that she had some setbacks in trying to schedule meetings with the Leadership team. Also, it takes a long time to change things. A lot of her time was spent waiting to see if the changes that are being made are working. The contract was set at a dollar amount for the entire project.

Update from Commission on Agency Restructure

Director Van Zandt stated that she concurs with Dr. Stelter's report. She did a very good job with meeting with every employee and everything is going very well. Director Van Zandt stated that she agrees with the earlier comment that "it is busier, but easier." This is definitely a feel that many of the staff has. Overall, things are going very well. An organization is a living organism and she believes in lifelong learning which is what we will continue to do.

Announcements about 2015 Meetings

February 7 – Lincoln, NE. Focus Topic: WIOA – Reorganization and Impacts to Service Delivery

May 2 – North Platte, NE. There will be no Focus Topic as the Executive Director's Performance Evaluation will take place.

August 1 – Either South Sioux City or Lincoln, NE. (Location depends on how many Center Staff will attend the meeting.) Focus Topic: Center Policies, Programs, Staffing Tweaks and Interactions with the Field.

November 7 – Omaha, NE. Focus Topic: Various Aspects of Staff Training for New Hires.

The exact locations of the meeting will be determined at a later date.

Public Comment

Mark Bulger – Mark stated that he appreciates the service of the commissioners. His questions and comments have to do with the Organizational study and Dr. Stelter's presentation. The phrase that he heard and liked the most was "providing the best possible services for the blind and visually impaired of Nebraska." This is what it is all

about. Sometimes if we do not look back, we do not know how to go forward. Mark stated that he is curious, so we do not get into this type of need for an Organizational Study in the future, are there any measurements that would be in place that will correct the ship as it changes directions in meeting the needs of consumers. Also, have all personnel issues that may have been a hindrance to the NCBVI been identified and addressed. Mark noted that he appreciates that we want to have staff who are happy and organized. However, his concern is that he heard a lot about the product that we are providing. Is it timely, is it efficient, is it quality, is it flexible? How do we manage these objectives when we tend to look at the feedback we get from staff? Staff is important, but they are just a means of providing the best possible services.

Director Van Zandt stated that with regard to client services, timeliness, quality and so on, NCBVI is held to standards and indicators that are direct requirements from the federal grant funders (Rehabilitation Services Administration). There are standards and indicators that we work towards achieving each year. They have to do with employment, the wages individuals receive when they get a job, stability, capability, and other things of the like. The project that Dr. Stelter has been operating has not been to negate these things, but it did not address these things because it was a different issue. We do tend to the other items all of the time.

Dr. Stelter stated that she did not go into all the finite details during her report because it would have been a very long and cumbersome report. One of the things they did look at was the numbers. For instance, how many clients does each counselor have and what type of track record does each counselor have. Dr. Stelter noted that she has done a lot of coaching with the individual supervisors and they have talked about how they track things and how they mentor their staff.

In the case of the Center, each program has looked at their area to see if there are some changes that could be made or ways that things could be done differently to benefit the clients.

Dr. Stelter stated that she believes that the agency culture has changed and staff embraces Dr. Van Zandt's participatory management to a greater degree. The Leadership Team that has been developed will help the changes stay rock solid. In the past staff thought that they could ask anyone their questions. Now it is very defined as to who the questions should go to. Also, taking away dual supervision has assisted in the clarity.

Dr. Stelter reported that she has conducted many group sessions with different departments within the Commission. She met with the Center staff, the Lincoln District, the Omaha District and the North Platte District staff several times and she also did individual coaching with those who were willing to participate. Many issues were dealt with; however there will always be issues. Whenever you deal with people you will always have issues. Dr. Stelter stated that she believes that there has been a culture established within the agency that now embraces communication and willingness to work together as a team. Director Van Zandt concurred with this statement.

Chairperson Hansen noted that this whole process was a good time to step back and re-evaluate how things were done at NCBVI. Once in a while it is helpful to get an outsiders perspective.

Bob Deaton – Bob noted that within the next few years there may be changes at NCBVI due to turnover, and particularly management as many of them approach their retirement year. Future planning will continue to be important.

Dale Oviatt – Dale stated that it sounds like NCBVI has made some excellent moves. One thing that he knows is important from his experiences is organizational knowledge. With the process of new employees coming into the agency, other employees changing jobs, others being promoted and others being retired, it is important to maintain the organizational knowledge. This means that what senior staff might know needs to be transferred to other generations so that the same thing is not being done over and over again based on what one thinks they know. It is important for new staff to understand the organizational history so they can have a critical eye as to what needs to be done as time goes on. Change is constantly happening and what we think is a good idea today may not be the same good idea in the future. We need to save what works and not save what does not work.

Cindy White – Cindy stated that she enjoyed attending today's meeting. The meeting shed a lot of light on things that she has had questions about as a consumer. The one thing that she continues to be interested in is the outcome numbers. It appears that there are currently quite a few people who are in case management and she is curious about some of the numbers and how they shake out. She will follow up with this after the meeting. Now that she has attended the meeting, Cindy stated that she feels more empowered to find the answers that she needs.

Chairperson Hansen thanked everyone for their comments.

Executive Session to discuss consultant's observations

Commissioner Jirak moved to go into Executive Session at 1:02 p.m. to discuss the observations of Dr. Nancy Stelter.

(Ref. Open Meeting Act; 84-1410. Closed session; (d) Evaluation of the job performance of a person when necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting.)

Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion.

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

Commissioner Jirak moved to come out of Executive Session at 1:39 p.m.

Commissioner Newman seconded the motion.

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

Adjourn

The November 1, 2014 NCBVI Commission Board meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the February 7, 2015 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