

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, February 1, 2014
4600 Valley Road, Room 4A

APPROVED MINUTES

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

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director IL; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Wes Majerus, Program Manager Technology.

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, NCBVI Contractor; Brad Loos; Barbara Loos; Stephanie Wagle; Sharon Brennfoerder; Terry Brennfoerder; Zach Haye; Barbara Epworth; Carol Gibilisco; Mark Bulger; Glennie Weiland; Jeff Altman; Karen Anderson; Tony Olivero; Kayde Rieken; Antonio Aguilar; Keenan Redinbaugh; Marty Aksamit.

Announcements Concerning Lunch Arrangements and Other Logistics

Kathy Stephens announced that minestrone soup and tomato basil soup will be served at approximately 12:10 p.m. in Room 4B. Subway will also deliver a three foot sub. Clients will prepare brownies and lemon bars for dessert.

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Hubert Paulsen recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Act was available in both print and Braille format. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newslines® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACB and NFB, the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of November 2013 Minutes

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of November 2, 2013 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Low Vision Services

Bob Deaton reported that when he thinks of low vision services he thinks of two things.

1. How well does the remaining functional vision work in real life and at what point do you need to use non-visual techniques?

It is part of the agency's responsibility to come to that understanding so that they are maximizing their visual and non-visual skills.

2. What kinds of aids and devices may work to help an individual use their remaining vision?

Bob Deaton noted that three clients are in attendance today to talk about the visual and non-visual techniques they use in their daily lives.

Antonio Aguilar – Antonio introduced himself as a visually impaired blind vendor. Antonio addressed the issue of at what point does he use his low vision skills and his non-visual skills. In the cafeteria where he works, he uses a lot of his non-visual skills because he has very low vision. He can still use some of his remaining vision in his job as well. The cafeteria operations change daily so his visual requirements change daily. Antonio stated that he has gotten a lot out of the program that he is in and at the Center. He graduated Center training and was placed in a job which he has been doing now for about two years. Antonio noted that he is doing quite well. He uses the techniques that he was taught at the Center and the techniques that he has learned during on the job training. Antonio noted that the services that he received for low vision training has been invaluable. Antonio also noted that he does not know if he will ever lose all of his vision, but if he does he is prepared.

At his job, Antonio stated that when he does computer work he needs to use JAWS. When he serves customers he sometimes has to ask them what they have. For money identification, Antonio stated he has a money reader and a money reader app on his phone, but he most often puts the bills up to his face and then he can recognize them. This is because it is fastest and he needs to work fast when operating the cafeteria as a lot of people come through in a short period of time.

Commissioner Newman asked Antonio how he figured out what kinds of devices would be right for him. Antonio noted that it is mostly trial and error. Antonio stated that he uses his CCTV a lot to do his P & L statements because the CCTV blows the fonts up incredibly large and it is easy for him to read. As a challenge comes up, he must decide whether to try a non-visual technique or a low visual technique.

Director Van Zandt asked what part the Commission staff played in him figuring out what techniques to use. Antonio stated that the techniques were mainly learned at the Center during Shop and Home Management. For him, it is a personal thing as whether to use visual techniques or non-visual techniques. He does not push himself to try to see something that he cannot because he has other options. Antonio noted that he does use all the techniques that he learned at the Center and he uses them in the business that he has. Antonio stated that he was very fortunate to enter the NBE program and that he has learned a lot from the experience.

Commissioner Hansen noted that Antonio has mentioned that the Center provided him with the skills to his non-visual techniques and introduced him to a lot of the low vision technology that is available. Commissioner Hansen asked if there was any instruction that he received (tips or tricks) that have aided him along the way. Antonio stated that he usually uses his judgment on the best way for him to perform a task.

The Commissioners thanked Antonio for his presentation.

Bob Deaton commented on Antonio's comment that he uses trial and error to see what works for him. This is generally the approach that is used in the field because NCBVI staff is not low vision specialists. We do not prescribe, or measure a person's functional vision in any way. The approach we use is to introduce people to the types of resources and devices that might work for them. What a person ultimately chooses is a personal determination. Low vision evaluations are conducted by those who have the medical background and training.

Stephanie Wagle – Stephanie stated that she was diagnosed with Stargardts disease when she was approximately 16 years old. At that time a Center counselor took her case. She has been offered many tools as she has peripheral vision but no central vision. Now, at age 25 she is a braille reader, she uses a CCTV for mail, a screen reader for her computer, and a screen enlarger. She finds herself using her blind alternatives and her low vision alternatives depending on what she needs at that particular moment. She does use a cane. Stephanie stated that the Center has been very open to let her choose what alternatives to use. Stephanie stated that she did go through Center training in 2010. By the time she went to college she was a braille user and knew how to use a cane. She uses her CCTV for short reading and her screen reader for long reading. She also uses braille for long readings.

Chairperson Johnson asked in comparing before she went through Center training to after she completed Center training, whether the way she used her vision change. Stephanie responded, yes, in many ways. Stephanie gave an example of when she was putting up shelves in her room last week she was using her tool kit. During this time she could not help but think of her Shop class which was all under sleep shades. Before beginning her Shop class she was uncertain as to how she would use the different tools in Shop, but she ended up making a jewelry box during the class with the instructor's guidelines. While she was putting up the shelves in her room, she could not tell which was the ¼ inch nail bit using her vision, but she could with her non-visual skills. If it was not for the Center training she would have needed assistance to find the ¼ inch drill bit. Stephanie stated that it was great to not have to depend on her vision to hang up the shelves.

Commissioner Newman asked if she needed any assistance to figure out what low vision devices would work for her. Stephanie stated that she has always been given so many options for different tools to use. Tools would be given to her to use on a trial basis and then she would choose which ones worked for her.

Stephanie stated that she is currently a Mary Kay consultant and this includes reading a lot of fine print in short paragraphs. For this and for reading recipes she uses the CCTV. Stephanie noted that throughout her training she has been given pointers on how to use different alternatives.

It was noted that Stephanie has been skydiving five times and she plans to go again this summer. While skydiving she also uses blindness techniques. She does not use her cane, but someone on the ground talks to her to guide her down. Stephanie stated that she enjoys the sport and she enjoys learning alternatives she can use to assist her. Stephanie noted that she graduated from college last December and she had been putting most of her time into her studies. The commissioners congratulated Stephanie on her graduation.

Marty Aksamit – Marty stated that in listening to the other clients speak, he feels like he is the odd man. Marty stated that he has been with the Commission since 1977. In that regard, he has watched the Commission grow and has watched it change quite a bit. When he started college back in 1977 all they had for tools was a tape recorder and a special device to play both sides of the tape. Marty stated that he admired everyone that graduated from college, as he had dropped out. Marty reported that he has a lot of history with the Commission. In 1984 he came to the Commission to get some training for his missionary training. The Commission helped him out by allowing him to build his own CCTV with a video camera. The reason he did this was because he was going into the mission field. This allowed him to not only use a CCTV, but also allowed him to video tape where he was working. Dale Hayes worked with him at time. Marty said he had not been through any blind training except for the school in Nebraska City. Marty noted that his eyes went bad when he was 12 years old and he has been legally blind ever since. He did attend the Nebraska City School for the Blind for three years and then finished up high school through mainstreaming. He then started college, then got married and went into the mission field. While he was at the mission tribe he lost all of his equipment

and he then came back to the Commission. The Commission helped him out again. At this time he was able to rebuild another CCTV and get some additional training on computers. This allowed him to continue on and he went to Wisconsin and worked as a video producer. He noted that he was legally blind and his partner was half deaf and they produced videos together utilizing zoom text, computers and all of the neat stuff that had been advanced since he started. In 1996 he went back to the mission field and in 2006 he got a back to work notice from Social Security. He then started working with the Commission again and Larry Roos was his counselor.

One of Marty's original designs for a CCTV was a camera on an extendable arm and this type of equipment was on the market now. The Commission helped him purchase this equipment.

Marty noted that he does scuba dive and he also rides his bike. He uses his bike to get around most of the time.

Commissioner Hansen stated that he is also a certified scuba diver and a bike rider too, which he did mostly in his earlier years. Commissioner Hansen noted that he has a pretty good idea of some of the alternatives he may use for these activities. Commissioner Hansen asked Marty what sort of low vision techniques is he making use of now versus non-visual skills.

Marty stated that when he was home on furlough he supported himself by running and working at construction. Over the years he has rebuilt three engines and built two houses and two garages. For a long time he had his own way of measuring things, which was very cumbersome. He would lay out a measuring tape and mark the tape. He would then go back to the saw and cut according to the markings. Marty said that he mentioned this to his counselor one day and he took him into the Shop area and showed him the measuring tool they use, which was new technology since he was in training. As far as how to determine what tool to use, Marty said he looks at what he wants to do and how does he do it. He may use low vision aides or non-visual aids or a combination of both. Marty noted that days ago when he wanted to go somewhere he had to give himself at least one hour of lead time to get to a particular house because he had to go to the porch or mailbox to find the house number. Today, with use of the iPhone and other devices, he can use a map that will give him audible and lead him right to the destination. Technology from when he started training to where it is now has changed dramatically for the better.

Chairperson Johnson asked Marty if he chooses what techniques he wants to use when working with his counselor. Marty stated that if he is stumped, like with the measuring tool, he and his counselor will talk about it and he will offer suggestions. Marty said that most of the time he is coming to his counselor saying can I do this? His counselor will usually say that it sounds great and is very helpful. When he went to UNL to start the process of earning a degree, they have a great process of getting books put into an audio format. Marty said he looked at what they were doing and then went on line and found an HP scanner that will scan a 250 page book in about 20 minutes. This will be in PDF format. The scanner costs about \$500, which is a lot cheaper than having all his books scanned at the book store. Marty said that he went ahead and purchased one of these scanners. Marty noted that now all of his books are in an iPod and can be read at any location he is at. Marty stated that he did recently earn his Master's Degree in Counseling from UNL. Commissioners and all present congratulated him on the achievement.

Bob Deaton asked if it would be safe to say that in choosing between low vision and non-visual techniques that he makes his decision based on whichever will give him the results he needs. Marty said that this would be true.

Commissioner Newman noted that it sounds like Marty has been around low vision for quite a while and that he is pretty comfortable with it. It also seems that the staff he has interacted with is pretty

knowledgeable about the low vision options that are available. Marty said this is true. Marty noted that Nancy (Coffman) has a tremendous knowledge of many things and she will give a range of options to research and choose from.

The commissioners thanked Marty for his presentation.

Commissioner Newman noted that he used to work for NCBVI and he still does do some consulting work for the Commission. Commissioner Newman noted that he enjoyed his work at NCBVI. Commissioner Newman added that he thinks that NCBVI has great staff and they do great work and he really cares about the staff. Most of the staff are hard workers and they are very knowledgeable. Commissioner Newman stated that after coming on board as a commissioner he has spoken to a counselor at every office, he has spoken to supervisors, and other individuals in the field. Commissioner Newman stated that he has observed that in general the counselors do good work and some of them do very good work. However, there is a variance in what people are doing and hear people saying that they need a little boost on learning as it relates to contrast, lighting and other things. Also, there are some new staff who have not received training on things like the medical causes of blindness. This training can help a counselor figure out what they should suggest when guiding someone through discovering what works for them. Everyone he spoke with stated they could use a refresher and that there are new things they need to learn. Commissioner Newman noted that there were also staff who stated that they would be happy to share what they know. Commissioner Newman added that he would love to see some additional training in this area for the staff.

Bob Deaton stated that perhaps staff could use some refresher training. Low vision training is something that NCBVI comes back to. When you hire new staff you have to go back and repeat some things. A several years ago they had a very good training at the district level provided by Elaine Rivera who came in from Baltimore. She talked about the key elements to be aware of when working with people with low vision; especially in helping people use their vision using devices that will make things appear bigger, bolder and brighter, etc. She also offered pointers on lighting. These types of things are pretty simple, but new staff may have difficulty when people persist in wanting to use their vision if they are struggling. Our staff can show people things and help them explore, but ultimately what works and does not work for them must be determined on an individual basis. When the vision does not work, that is when you really must understand that it is time to bring in non-visual skills. If people really want to explore the visual aspects of things, then we need to do what we can to help them get a low vision evaluation provided by the people who have to proper credentials.

Bob Deaton reported that later this month he is going to go out and spend two days in North Platte for a District meeting. One of the items they will talk about is low vision. During this meeting he will spend some time discussing the items talked about at today's Focus Topic. The Commission is always hiring new staff and training is always something we need to come back to.

Commissioner Jirak stated that he has two points. First, he wants to stress that the State of Nebraska has added a resource for low vision. The President of the Council of Citizens with Low Vision is an ACB National affiliate that recognizes the importance of low vision. The group has developed a best practices document when it comes to printed text. Commissioner Jirak noted that since he is the President of the group and he would be happy to share that resource.

Second, it is talked about staff having knowledge in low vision. Commissioner Jirak did concur that staff does a good job. Commissioner Jirak noted that we certify staff with 600 hours of sleep shade training with what has been dubbed to be experts in blindness. Commissioner Jirak asked what type of certification NCBVI provides for low vision services. Bob Deaton stated that the Commission does not provide certification for low vision because we are not medical professionals and we do not have

the curriculum for diagnosis. Commissioner Jirak stated that when he says certification in low vision, he is talking about what resources of knowledge are obtained. Director Van Zandt stated that certification for the low vision field is not really the right term for the skills and the training that our staff is provided with. In fact, over time NCBVI has had low vision kits in all the offices and have done a lot of different kinds of training in low vision. The training is a blend of things. The Nebraska Board of Optometrists wrote the Commission and the Department of Education a letter to say that they were the eye care specialists and educators and rehab people or educators should not be diagnosing or prescribing low vision equipment. Director Van Zandt noted that she did respond to the letter and a copy of that letter is part of the Focus Topic materials. NCBVI is not certified in low vision, but we do train our staff to know how to work individually with the person to figure out what techniques will work best for them. This is very individualized. It is true that NCBVI provides low vision training on an ongoing basis and we are looking at enhancing that even more. It is not new to the Commission. The Commission is very clear that if an individual needs a more diagnostic evaluation then we will pay for them to go get one from the experts.

Chairperson Johnson asked what a low vision evaluation includes and what a person might get out of that that would be useful. Connie Daly stated that usually the doctor's eye report is looked at to determine where to start with the person. Then they let the person evaluate different low vision devices and they usually provide some training on holding the item close to your eye and then moving it away until it becomes in focus. They talk about contrast and they are now getting more into technology and using computers, etc. They do let people try different things and they have strategies for doing things more effectively with low vision. The Low Vision Clinic will have all types of equipment in their facility for people to try. It was noted that there are approximately 300 low vision providers across the state.

Commissioner Hansen asked if new staff receive any training in low vision when they start as a new staff member. Bob Deaton noted that new staff don't really receive low vision training while they are in Center training, but after Center training they will shadow other staff and learn some non-visual techniques. This is during their probationary period. The supervisor and the deputy directors also cover non-visual techniques with the staff member. Bob Deaton stated that during his February training he will also cover the role of the rehab counselor among other things.

Chairperson Johnson asked if the 600 initial hours of staff training are all sleep shade training. Director Van Zandt stated that the 600 hours new staff training is sleep shade training. It is after that, when the counselor gets in the field that they learn low vision techniques. This training is not as systematic as the sleep shade training is. We have a checklist that the new supervisor and deputy directors need to cover with the person. Connie Daly added that the next two to three months that the staff person is on board is spent shadowing other counselors to see how they do things. In Omaha and Lincoln they make sure that they go to a low vision evaluation so they can see what they do there.

Carlos Servan noted that NCBVI tries to provide non-visual techniques, not because we have to, but because they are not widely available in Nebraska. Low vision training is widely available in Nebraska. It is not that the need of low vision training is ignored, but it is available in the private sector. Carlos Servan noted that he feels that this discussion has been very good. The comments will be brought to the staff to see how they feel. Carlos Servan noted that NCBVI does spend a lot of money on low vision services as well as non-visual services.

Director Van Zandt reminded everyone that the documents that were provided to the Board prior to the meeting will be a part of the Minutes. These documents do go into more detail about what NCBVI provides regarding low vision services.

Bob Deaton reiterated that new staff does shadow current staff to see how they introduce low vision aides, devices and strategies to clients. The mechanical aspects of low vision services are being covered. However, even though staff may know what they are supposed to do, there needs to be a focus on why. We need to be talking to staff about what they are really doing.

Commissioner Jirak mentioned that folks should visit the website cclvi.org. On this website, every third Tuesday of the month there is a focus that takes place. It is called "Let's Talk Low Vision" with Dr. Bill. For the entire calendar year 2014, there are low vision topics that will be discussed. CCLVI also has a new publication "Insights Into Low Vision" which has articles by 26 authors, some of whom are nationally known in their fields. This 8 1/2" X 11" 154-page large print easy-to-read formatted book has 30 articles with titles such as: "How to Find a Low Vision Specialist," "Tips to Reduce glare," "Driving with Low Vision," "Tips to Help You Use Your Computer," and a variety of others. This book has been a long time in coming and should prove to be very useful to those in the low vision community. The book is available for \$20 to non-members of CCLVI and free to current members. Commissioner Newman stated that he thinks that NCBVI should take a look at this book. It was agreed that NCBVI will order a copy.

Chairperson Johnson thanked everyone for their input into the Focus Topic.

Public Comment

Jeff Altman – Jeff Altman noted that aside from his role on the National Federation of the Blind, he is also an orientation and mobility instructor at NCBVI. Part of what we have to understand is the difference between gut reaction, best guess and informed choice. A lot of folks, when they come in for rehabilitation are at the gut reaction level. They are losing something and they want it back. There are definitely devices that will help folks get some of that back. There are also situations where people have been dealing with vision loss for a while and their response is that they need to read their dollar bills, etc. Therefore, they may think the best thing for them is to have a CCTV. This may do the job, but then you have a device that is not very mobile or there may be a device that is available, but the battery dies on a regular basis. Therefore, the possibility of looking at other alternatives may not be looked at. Informed choice is about having complete information about what is going to be effective, efficient and safe. Speaking in his area of expertise which is cane travel, it is very possible for some folks who have lost some vision to go with their gut reaction and move around efficiently. Sometimes this may depend on lighting. The real role of what is done in an Orientation Center where a person is going through full immersion is to develop a complete set of non-visual skills. These skills cannot be learned in five minutes or five days. It takes six to nine months to really master the skills. These skills can then be judged against low vision techniques. If a person has a complete body of knowledge of what works for them and how to use non-visual techniques, they can make a genuine informed choice as to what technique they will use. Being blind means not having reliable vision. People should have a complete set of skills when they go out in the world. As for the agency attempting to do some type of low vision work or low vision evaluations, he feels that this is best done by the people who are professionals in that field. It is best for the agency to refer people to a low vision clinic and then take those recommendations and try to help the person try to implement that in their daily life. It is important for staff of NCBVI to be familiar with the different things that are available in terms of low vision, but he does not feel that NCBVI should show up at a person's house with a bunch of different low vision devices to try.

Mark Bulger – Mark welcomed Robert Newman and Becky Rieken to the Board of Commissioners and he thanked them for their commitment to serve consumers like himself. Mark noted that he was impressed by the success stories of Marty, Antonio and Stephanie. When he hears the words Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, this represents a potential service for 30,000 to 60,000 people in Nebraska who are either blind or visually impaired. Of that probably

10,000 is probably considered legally blind. Of the legally blind, 2,000 to 3,000 may have total blindness. One out of seven of that population experiences vision loss or blindness as a child. A lot of vision loss occurs as an adult. When he hears the term low vision, he thinks of utilization and optimization of existing vision with adaptive devices and alternative techniques. We have to examine why NCBVI exists. Why it is publically funded? Is it because the public thinks they need to support the poor blind and visually impaired people? No, this is not the case. It is that they realize that if they invest money they can help them live independently and get them rehabilitated and back in the work force. As we look at low vision, we need to look at it in the context of how we take low vision into the rehabilitation process. People need to be able to make informed choices. NCBVI is a statewide agency that serves thousands of people and we have an Orientation Center that can serve about 15 clients at one time. While informed choice may be best, is it practical in all cases. How do we make as many blind and visually impaired people live as independently as possible so they can live in their community and not be a burden. More importantly, how do we help them find gainful employment? Mark stated that he feels we do not need low vision specialists, but we need low vision specialists in rehabilitation. With specialized training and with the qualifications that may be out there, we can minimize the time spent on trial and error. This will save time and money. When he hears error, he hears failure; and when you fail sometimes you do not get a second chance. Mark stated that his concern is that while he has heard a lot of people talk about the access they have had to many devices, is this true statewide. Do we have the resources to reach every person who seeks the services to remain more independent and to seek employment? Mark stated he thinks there needs to be an emphasis on developing that specialty of not low vision specialists, but low vision rehabilitation specialists. Nebraska should look to see what other states are doing and what other certifications are available. Mark noted that he applauds what is going on now. When he first started coming to NCBVI Board meetings eight years ago, he did not hear a lot of discussion about low vision, but he does hear it now. Mark would like to get away from the trial and error field and begin making some accurate assessments. Mark looks at NCBVI as the doctors of vocational rehabilitation in blindness. Mark stated that he does not believe that everyone needs six to nine months of blindness training, as sometimes just the right device can keep them employed.

Marty Aksamit – Marty noted that he has been around NCBVI for quite a while and he has gotten to know and work with a lot of the different counselors. Marty stated that he feels sorry for their responsibility, minus their abilities, in the sense that they have restrictions put on them. Marty stated he has noticed that counselors show a resistance to give direct advice to clients because they do not diagnose. Marty stated that he feels a big portion of the service is being overlooked, unless he is unaware of it being in existence. Most clients would be more than happy to participate as a connection for clients with similar vision situations and similar personalities. Clients who have been around for a while could help assist new clients. Marty stated that he feels this type of forum would be tremendous.

Tony Olivero – Tony noted that he has heard a lot of people talking about when residual vision is effective and when it is not. Tony stated that he has had a low vision evaluation for on the job function and sometimes, if you are not careful, the solution can get pushed to using the residual vision for cost effectiveness and expediency. In his case, he was to identify printer cartridges when working in an IT shop. The specialist solution was a magnifier that clipped onto my glasses along with a portable CCTV. At this time he could identify the printer cartridge box, but it took about 90 seconds per box. A better and more efficient solution would have been to sort the printer cartridge boxes into their own containers. With this solution he could have found the cartridges in about 10 seconds. Tony cautioned the Commission that when working with low vision specialists to ensure that the consumer understands that residual vision is an option, but effectiveness and expediency are also important when it comes to looking at alternatives.

Keenan Redinbaugh – Katie noted that she and many other seniors have fear and resistance to adapting. Keenan said that her vision has been declining significantly. She has been to three specialists who have never suggested any types of adaptive technology for her. Keenan said that her greatest help has been from the low vision clinic and the ophthalmologist and counselors who work there. Many seniors are very hesitant and they just stay home when they begin to lose their vision. What works for young people is not always the same that is needed for seniors.

Barbara Loos – Barbara noted that it was mentioned that various resources and networking are available. Both of these are very important and she encourages the Commission to continue to look to various resources on the subject of low vision. At www.nfb.org there is a section in their publications specifically on low vision. Specifically, there is a section for children and seniors and there are also general articles on vision loss. Barbara recommended that people read these articles.

Connie Daly – Connie noted that she said that low vision providers will try to provide different magnifiers for people. This is trial and error as well; however, this is what all the eye doctors do because they cannot see what you see. When she goes to the eye doctor and checks out lenses, they may have a basis for where they should start, but it is always up to her to determine what is clear and what is not clear.

Karen Anderson – Karen noted that she appreciated what Keenan said earlier about differing levels of optimism. She has seen people of all ages being pessimistic about their vision loss. Karen stated that she thinks that positive mentoring is an important part of the rehab process.

Break

A break was taken at 10:45 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11:02 a.m.

Commissioner's Report

Chairperson Johnson reported that she attended the NCSAB Fall Conference in Denver along with Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and Carlos Serván. Johnson stated she enjoyed listening to the concepts and ideas on how other states do things.

Commissioner Hansen reported that he has been working on staff projects. He also had the opportunity to represent the University of Nebraska and give a presentation along with Wes Majerus at Southeast Community College to do some education on blindness accessibility in technology and helping their IT staff to better understand some concepts and how to make things accessible to some of their student faculty. Commissioner Hansen noted that he has been contacted since then to help them out some more. This is the start of a good relationship.

Report from the Executive Director

With Center Director Fatos Floyd and Personnel Officer Dave Robinson, I've worked on the hiring of a part-time Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Tech for our Lincoln Front Desk. We were fortunate to hire Joyce Thompson, who had been in the position as a SOS (state temporary services) employee. Joyce is now in Center training; she will be full-time status through the six-week training and then return to her half-time schedule. Other work on personnel changes are detailed later in this report.

We completed a final update to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Monitoring Review Corrective Action Plan. All items have been fully resolved.

I continue to work with Wes, Bill, and various State officials on aspects related to accessibility problems of various state systems applications. Wes has been working diligently to remedy the

problems for the long term. A more complete report from Wes is provided further on. Every week, I have a telephone meeting with State Personnel to review progress on accessibility issues of their system. This has helped to keep things moving, even though there is a long way to go.

I continue to attend meetings with Center staff and clients, Field offices, our Administrative Team including an hour of Philosophy at each meeting, NBE Vendors Committee, Nebraska State agency directors, Lincoln/Lancaster Multicultural Advisory Committee. Last November, I was re-elected National Council of State Agencies for the Blind Treasurer. Also meet and communicate with Friends of the Commission.

We have been working on policies and processes, field and center communications, authorizations, clarifying personnel processes, and public informational materials. Connie Daly has been the key person working with an advertising firm, to develop up to date print brochures and collaterals, giving us current, professional quality materials with photographs, quotes and text information.

We continue with follow up to the Leadership Retreat with Dr. Nancy Stelter for our supervisors and managers. Individual coaching sessions are being provided to build our individual skills as well as the team as a whole.

Staff members are doing work with areas outside their normal routine. Coming up, Cindy Zimmer will work the FYI program in North Platte. Mitzy Buchanan will be part of the staff for Winnerfest. As each program is planned, the committee notifies supervisors statewide to offer the opportunity for staff to volunteer. This and other work helps statewide to improve communication, enhance understanding, and to strengthen the agency as a whole.

Our formal request to relocate Lincoln District, the Center, and Administrative offices is in the hands of the State of Nebraska Administrative Services Department. We have inquired about the status but have not heard back, other than that they do have all the materials required. We are still hopeful that a move could occur around July 1, 2014.

Since November, we received additional funding of \$219,898 from Social Security (SSA) Reimbursements. We invest in our clients, and work hard to provide the counseling and training needed, and have a great system for tracking the work done. These reimbursements are due to the excellent work of all NCBVI staff members, who are committed to helping clients achieve meaningful employment and get off benefits!

End of the year reports of all our federal grants have been completed. This includes some quarterly and full-year reports. Final reports and a new proposal for our Omaha area PILBO project were completed, to provide low vision and other items for independent living, for the greater-Omaha area. We completed the Annual Report to the Governor. It has been disseminated and posted to the website.

A law (LB429) was passed by the Unicameral in 2013 which will establish a database so that the public can search information about all contracts with every state agency. Administrative Services and the OCIO (Office of the Chief Information Officer) were charged with developing the website and the database. Agencies are charged with uploading all contracts to the system; the public will have access when it goes live later this year. Our involvement has been to work with OCIO to assure accessibility of the system and also to get our own contracts uploaded to the system as mandated. There are several months of development for this, before the system is ready for agencies and then before it is active for the public.

I met with our new Lincoln Counselor, Eric Buckwalter to discuss our agency and overall approach to quality services for our clients. I also met with a University student who is blind, to discuss our approach to communication. She will be interviewing other staff and clients as a part of her research project.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

I have been reviewing the CSNA especially as it relates to implementing suggestions. The 2015 State Plan for RSA will include focus on information from the assessment.

Field Services

During our first quarter of Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (October 1 through December 31, 2013), we served 534 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Thirteen (13) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Nine (9) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, transfers to another agency, failure to cooperate, and other).

In the Independent Living (IL) track, we have served 345 clients were served, in all statuses. Sixty five (65) were closed successfully; six (6) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons).

Nebraska Center for the Blind

Total Full-time Clients Served between 1996 through January, 2014: 216

Competitive Employment: 125

Homemakers: 23

Students: 45

Results:

Of the clients that finished training and schooling;

88 percent are employed (competitive employment and homemaker)

74.5 percent of the clients who finished training and schooling are competitively employed

13 percent are homemakers

21 percent are students from the total number

10 percent are not working

Activities:

Halloween luncheon

Pumpkin carving

Japanese concert

Thanksgiving dinner

NFB state convention

Holiday party

Secret Santa

Holiday giving

Field Services by Carlos Serván

A college workshop is scheduled for March 14-16 in Grand Island. This is in partnership with NFB NABS (Nebraska Association of Blind Students).

The State Staff meeting will be in Grand Island during the first week of April.

Field and Center staff met in November to come up with ways to communicate better. A list of recommendations came out of this meeting which went to the supervisors and finally approved by the Director. Dr. Van Zandt sent this new policy to all staff.

A sub committee was formed to help develop a couple of forms for the Center prerequisites. Vicky and Carol presented at the January 16 meeting and the form will be implemented and training will be provided to staff.

A committee on training clients with cognitive disabilities was formed to find better ways to provide training to this population.

An OC (orientation counselor) position was changed to a VR position in Omaha. This is because of the need to serve more VR clients.

Social Security Work Incentive training was provided to some staff on January 14. This was sponsored by TACE.

Some staff members are getting Life Coaching training.

We came up with a case-review instrument to help counselors and supervisors manage their cases better.

North Platte District by Sarah Stewart

I'd like to start by thanking Bob Deaton and Carlos Servan for taking over supervisory duties while I was on maternity leave these past few months. The North Platte District has been busy keeping things running smoothly during temporary staffing adjustments. Scott Pavelka continues to help out in the Scottsbluff office area while Angie Hoff is on medical restriction from travel. Cristal Dimas had taken over my caseload until I returned on January 14th. I'd like to thank the North Platte District and all NCBVI staff for their teamwork.

Winnerfest was held at the Aurora Leadership Center on November 7-9th. Scott Pavelka served on the committee and represented our district this time. The North Platte District had 5 participants this fall. Once again, it sounds like it was a great program.

Most staff from our district participated in the Center/Field relations meeting held on November 15th. Angie Hoff and Jamie Forbis were part of the committee assigned to work on the new 3 day stay and center prerequisite forms.

Cristal Dimas attended the Latino Leadership conference in Omaha on November 15th. The conference was sponsored by US Bank and encouraged networking and leadership opportunities for Latino students with businesses and community resources.

Deanna Jesse, OIB (Older Blind) Program Specialist, presented on fall prevention and vision loss several times in the Lincoln area. She also continues to conduct in-services state wide.

On November 19th and 20th, Jan Brandt attended two sessions of UNK's Disabilities Awareness Week, including a panel of Students with Abilities, and a seminar about Assistive Technology in the Classroom. She also participated in a 2 hour webinar, Funding of Assistive Technology through State VR Agencies in December.

The North Platte office has been working on outreach in their community and counselors have begun attending meetings for the Transition Agency Council for Youth and the Interagency Council of Lincoln County.

The North Platte District has begun working with Dr. Nancy Stelter this quarter. The North Platte office met with her in December and the Kearney office is scheduled to meet with her at the end of January. Arrangements have not yet been made for the Scottsbluff office to meet with her.

Jan Brandt, Cristal Dimas, and Scott Pavelka participated in the Social Security Blue Book Training presented by Region 7 TACE on January 14th in Lincoln.

The North Platte District had four successful closures this quarter including a personal and home care aid, school/academic counselor, child care worker and stock clerk.

Omaha District Update by Nancy Flearl

We had staff that worked on the planning committee and worked Winnerfest November 7 through 9. The students went to the York versus Ralston Football game with emphasis of taking part in Extra-curricular activities. A part of friendship is doing things that others want to do, that just might mean attending high school sports functions. Kelly is working with the planning team for the March Winnerfest.

We have had 5 clients that have been employed since the last meeting as a Nursing Instructor, Shipping Clerk, Maintenance Worker, Library Assistant, and Administrative Assistant.

We had 12 clients working with the Omaha Steaks gift box job. As I mentioned in November it allows for us to do a community assessment on how people perform on the job, interpersonal skills, attendance, etc. It also allows for current work history. One person was hired the first part of December and started on December 14th. Several others have had great interviews. Ashley has followed up with Omaha Steaks and because of our work on this project are interested in meeting with us promote employment opportunities within their organization. It is a delight to have Ashley who finished her training and started working the Omaha office is a wonderful addition to our staff.

Carol and Kathy have been working on the committee to develop the forms that will be used for when a client is interested in attending the center.

Carol is working on the planning committee with Cristal and NABS (Nebraska Association of Blind Students) to plan the College Workshop in March.

Kelly is attended the Project Search that is a partnership with NCBVI, VR, PayPal, Bellevue Public Schools January 9 and 10th.

Kathy Brown Hollins has moved to a VR position working closely with transition age students.

Elaine is working on a committee to plan training for young adults that experience multiple disabilities.

Staff are participating in a webinar on January 9th on how to obtain Social Security Verification and more extensive training on Social Security on January 14th & 15th.

We will be having training in February by Kris Thaller a Life Coach.

We have had an increase in referrals this past month especially of transition age. Not as many for older blind services.

We have had some turnover in the VR Tech position. We have a temp Vanessa Tatum that starts on January 13th. We have opened the VR Tech Position and will be conducting interviews once it is closed.

Lincoln District by Connie Daly

We met with Lincoln Public Schools to strengthen our relationship. It was a very successful meeting. They asked if we could meet with them every three months or so to discuss programs and common clients.

Larry Roos arranged training to Rehabilitation Counselors on Social Security. The first day focused on determining eligibility. It was very helpful and should allow us to be of more assistance to our clients. Many of the staff attended additional training the second day that focused on PASS plans.

Through our business advisory council we recently had contact with Steve Dunn. He owns an insurance company and he is interested in hiring blind people. He says that there is a shortage of customer service reps and licensed insurance agents. We have looked at the software and it is accessible. We are going to work with him to promote the hiring of blind people in this area.

We had a kid's group and we went to SAC museum. There was a "Math Alive" exhibition and we had a tour of the museum. The kid's worked on carrying trays during lunch time.

We introduced a new class called By Invitation Only. This class focuses on life skills such as budgeting, decision making skills...etc. We collaborated with Goodwill. It is a six week class. We would like to do some tweaking of the material and offer it again.

We had clients get jobs at Applebee's, Central Community College, Lancaster Manor, Goetzhtman Heating and Air Conditioning, Wahoo Public Schools, personal assistant with Hastings League of Human Dignity, and the Internal Revenue Service.

Business Office - Bill Brown

- Stelter Study
- Accessibility Issues with Administrative Services E1-9.1, Cornerstone and Workday, LB 429 database, Surplus Property system
- Federal Reporting 425's, RSA-2, RSA-15, 7OB, 704
- NCBVI Space Requirements and Requisitions
- Financial Status, Match, Funds, Grants
- Cost Allocation Plan

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

On November 13 she attended an Independent Agency meeting for Pearl in her absence. The topic of the meeting was Campaign Activity for State employees.

Kathy worked on the 2013 annual report to the Governor it was submitted on Friday, January 3, 2014.

Attended the fixed asset coordinators meeting with Bill.

Listened to two live stream presentations of Craig Zablocki. They were Lighten up or Burn Out and Joy in the Workplace. The presentations were very good. This was a part of the Celebrate Learning Open House.

She attended Life Coach training with Kris Thaller. Also attending were Dottie, Jan S., Don, Dave and Carlos.

Attended a session with Dr. Nancy Stelter.

Worked on updating commissioner bios, email addresses, terms, etc. on the website.

Continues to work on surplus of outdated agency equipment.

Is working with Bill Brown to update the agency contracts for services.

Wes Majerus, Technology Program Manager

The technology program has worked on a number of tasks this quarter. As a team, we have been asked to present at a College Workshop that is being developed as a partnership between the Commission and the Nebraska Association of Blind students. The workshop is March 14-16, 2014. The technology specialists will present on the technology request process, as well as demonstrate technical devices such as notetakers, Braille displays, screen readers, and access to books from a variety of sources. The team also continues to serve clients in each of their districts.

In December, I attended the first of four sessions of the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute's Executive Leadership Series. This is offered by the Interwork Institute, which is part of San Diego State University. The first session focused heavily on the Rehabilitation Act and presented introductory material useful for the following three sessions. It also introduced coaching concepts that will be used throughout the curriculum. These include one-on-one coaching and a 360-degree leadership assessment that evaluates an individual's leadership style through self-evaluation and evaluations of other observers. I feel this training will benefit me in the future, and look forward to the next three sessions in March, June, and October.

I continue to support infrastructure and staff computer needs. We are scheduling the test of a client tracking system, AWARE, that the Commission is evaluating. We hope to have staff from all districts and the Center look at the system to give feedback on its use. I am also working with the Office of the CIO to establish Wireless LAN connectivity in the offices that have not previously had access to wireless functionality. This will assist greatly as many new devices are being procured for our clients and for our staff that do not have the ability to be hard wired into a network. Working with these types of devices has meant going to a place outside the office where wifi was available. I will also assist the business office staff in preparing for a new requirement that all of our contracts must be uploaded to a database for public access. This will include ensuring the contracts are accessible, and giving staff the tools they need to put the contracts into the correct format for the database to accept.

I continue to work on a number of accessibility projects. It seems that the demand for accessibility work has increased this quarter. I continue to provide guidance to administrators and developers of Workday, Cornerstone, and Edge, three systems in use by the state. Work on Cornerstone, which houses the Performance Appraisal System, had ceased for a time, but we are resuming discussions about system accessibility. The State is looking to adopt a new training platform called Lynda.com. It offers video content on a variety of subjects, and is usable via the web and on mobile devices. I have found some accessibility defects in the system and will be submitting a report on them when the testing period is complete. As mentioned previously, a new system is being developed to allow contracts to be stored in a database and then accessed by the public. I have been working with Commission staff and members of the team developing the system to present strategies for making content accessible. This includes providing strategies on how to upload documents in an accessible format and examining the software that is used to upload and manage the documents. I also hope to examine the site that the public will access at some point to ensure it is accessible.

Dave Robinson, Personnel Officer

Joyce Thompson's last day as an S.O.S. employee was November 29, 2013 and her first day as a permanent part-time employee with the agency was December 2, 2013. Joyce started Center training on January 13, 2013. A temporary from S.O.S., Hillary Umland, was hired for six weeks to fill in.

Kyndra Baring-Gulley, from our Omaha office, is no longer with the agency, effective December 13, 2013. A temporary worker from S.O.S. is helping with the front desk duties in Omaha, until a replacement can be hired.

The position vacated by Kyndra was advertised and closed on January 17, 2013

A request to re-classify the open position of Orientation Counselor II, that was occupied by Jane McGhee for a brief period of time to Vocational Rehabilitation Technician, with an emphasis on apartment resource duties, was submitted and approved. The position has been staffed on a part-time basis through S.O.S. and it was determined that it could be re-classified to the Voc. Rehab. Tech. classification and still provide the necessary services to clients.

Position was advertised and closed on January 10, 2013. Thirteen applications were received and most of them wanted daytime or full-time hours. After screening the applications, three applications were selected for the interview pool. When contacted, two of the applicants withdrew because of either conflicts with their other job, or location, leaving one interview to conduct on January 24, 2013.

We are in the process of re-classifying Kathy Brown-Hollins from an Orientation Counselor to a VR Counselor. Since the change is lateral and there are no financial considerations, the request is not expected to encounter any difficulties and because is a re-classification, will not be advertised.

We are looking into re-opening a long vacant Counselor position in the Center. The official classification will remain as an Orientation Counselor, but the internal title will be Special Needs Counselor. This will not be filled right away, but we are in the process required for the redesign of the position.

End of Report

Commissioner Hansen noted that the North Platte District is doing some outreach which involves some of their staff attending meetings of some organizations that they may not have worked with in the past. Commissioner Hansen stated that he would like to know more about the Transition Agency Council for Youth. Specifically, he would like to know what this Council is. Director Van Zandt reported that the Workforce Investment Board has three local Boards in the State and each Workforce Board has a youth council. It is very possible that this is what is being talked about. There is also a Youth Leadership organization that was initiated by the VR general agency. Director Van Zandt stated that she will defer this question back to Sarah Stewart for clarification.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she would like to know the average length of time that a client is a client, and she would also like to know the average length of time that a client stays in a particular status. Director Van Zandt stated that she will check with Dottie Wilmott to get these statistics.

Commissioner Hansen noted that it has been identified by NCBVI that we need to possibly replace eForce with a different product because of all the different constant changes that are happening in federal regulations. Commissioner Hansen asked for a clarification of this process.

Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI is currently doing some testing with a company that has a product that is a case management and fiscal management system. The testing process is with some staff using visuals and others using screen readers testing how the system works in general as well as the accessibility issues. Wes Majerus added that the company is Alliance Enterprise and the system being looked at right now is called AWARE. Last September some of the management staff looked at the system and now testing is being conducted by counselors across the state. They were initially doing some comparing and contrasting, but now they want to see how easy it is to use and if it would meet our needs. This testing is still underway.

Commissioner Hansen asked if the testing goes well, will this be the product that is chosen or will they be bringing in another product to put through the same evaluation?

Director Van Zandt stated that before any testing began they did research on the different products, what states are using which, and whether the product is meeting the needs. Therefore, she would say that they have narrowed it down to the AWARE system and now they are doing more in depth testing. Wes Majerus added that they are still in the evaluative state and they are not going forward at this time. There are a lot of other pieces to the puzzle.

Chairperson Johnson inquired as to the status of the plans for updating the offices. Director Van Zandt reported that the Scottsbluff office is in their new office space in downtown Scottsbluff. The North Platte office has had its training kitchen remodeled and the office space has been reorganized. In Kearney there have been a few renovations completed, but mostly the office is pretty up to date. In Norfolk, office space has been added for Dave Robinson, who had been working out of the kitchen/meeting room area. In Omaha, renovations have been completed over the years within the space that we have. The training kitchen in Omaha is scheduled to be updated in the near future. The Lincoln office is also looking for new space. Currently the Building Division has everything that it needs from NCBVI regarding space needs and we are waiting for further details. It is hopeful to have something in the works by July 2014.

Unfinished Business

Budget Update

Director Van Zandt noted that the Commission is doing very well with the budget. The agency has not yet started to use the 2014 federal dollars which started October 1, 2013. The federal law requires that we use program income first and social security reimbursement qualifies as program income. We are currently using this money on salaries, client services and everything else we do. As this money is used up we will go to using the grant money. This is the year that our State Biennium Budget request will be completed and submitted. We will submit it to the state on September 15, 2014. Between now and then we will work on compiling the new request. Director Van Zandt noted that management talks all along about the agency's priorities for spending funds. In the months up to September 15 they will go into a lot more detail regarding line item expenses, budget and looking at what we need to accomplish in the next two years. The agency budget is constantly monitored and the business manager attends all the supervisor meetings in order to keep everyone updated.

Chairperson Johnson inquired as to how the move of the Lincoln office will work into the budget. Director Van Zandt reported that the Commission has the funds to make the move possible.

NFB Newsline® Update

January 28, 2014

Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to 2014 and welcome to our two new Commissioners! Skating right into the updates; NFB-Newsline® started out the year right with an addition of a new publication. The VERGE was added to the Breaking News section and features articles and information on technology, science, arts and culture. This brings to total number of Breaking News publications to 8 and the total number of publications available on NFB-Newsline® to 352!

If you'll remember from my last report, with the new reporting system for stats I'm not able to report on the current month. So, this report will include stats from October and next quarters report will include stats from January. Also by next quarter a year end summery will be available. For now, however, here are the stats for October, November and December 2013.

October 2013

Number of Subscribers: 1706

New Subscriptions: 13
Total Call Minutes: 14167
Call Frequency: 34.26 minutes.
Total Online Accesses: 1809
Total Content Accesses: 4129
Content Access Frequency: 10.81 minutes.
Calls: 1303
Average Call Length: 10.87
Percent Local Calls: 45.53
Web Sessions: 280
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions: 156
In Your Pocket Deliveries: 26
NLS DTB Deliveries: Coming Soon Data Not Available
Podable Deliveries: Coming Soon Data Not Available
E-mail Deliveries: 1347
Nebraska Newspapers: 2475
Nebraska Local Channels: 140
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts: 115
National Newspapers: 496
International Newspapers: 1
My Newspaper: 147
Breaking News Online: 33
Magazines: 63
TV Listings: 425

November 2013

Number of Subscribers: 1715
New Subscriptions: 10
Total Call Minutes: 13079
Call Frequency: 34.67 minutes.
Total Online Accesses: 1778
Total Content Accesses: 3873
Content Access Frequency: 11.15 minutes.
Calls: 1246
Average Call Length: 10.50
Percent Local Calls: 43.99
Web Sessions: 300
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions: 143
In Your Pocket Deliveries: 141
NLS DTB Deliveries: Data Not Available
Podable Deliveries: Data Not Available
E-mail Deliveries: 1194
Nebraska Newspapers: 2394
Nebraska Local Channels: 103
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts: 141
National Newspapers: 438
International Newspapers: 0
My Newspaper: 139
Breaking News Online: 24
Magazines: 89
TV Listings: 450

December 2013
Number of Subscribers: 1722
New Subscriptions: 7
Total Call Minutes: 15909
Call Frequency: 33.51 minutes.
Total Online Accesses: 2461
Total Content Accesses: 4649
Content Access Frequency: 9.60 minutes.
Calls: 1332
Average Call Length: 11.94
Percent Local Calls: 42.72
Web Sessions: 466
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions: 165
In Your Pocket Deliveries: 232
NLS DTB Deliveries: Data Not Available
Podable Deliveries: Data Not Available
E-mail Deliveries: 1598
Nebraska Newspapers: 2666
Nebraska Local Channels: 113
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts: 144
National Newspapers: 468
International Newspapers: 14
My Newspaper: 163
Breaking News Online: 47
Magazines: 115
TV Listings: 504

Now that your mind is snowy with numbers I will conclude my report for this quarter. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me at (402) 471-8102, newsline@ne.nfb.org or via Twitter @NFB_NEWSLINE_NE. As always happy reading!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

There were no CAP issues to report.

Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update

Carlos Serván reported on Nebraska Business Enterprise updates.

NBE transitioned The State Patrol training center in Grand Island to Marty Borges as a sub-contractor.

Don Ward met with the VA Medical Center in Omaha to look at new opportunities they may have. He has a second meeting scheduled for the Lincoln Medical Center location. This meeting happened the week of January 27 and they want NBE to run their small cafeteria and their vending machines. This hospital has 240 employees and 140 volunteers.

Laurie Jacobsen has started training as a new vendor for Lincoln.

The first week of January, NBE transferred the operation of the two Ashland rest areas to Chris Nolan. These two sites were added to his other four existing locations.

We are working on new opportunities: A state building on 1526 K Street in Lincoln, a canteen at the Joint Forces in Lincoln, and a new opportunity with The Department of Agriculture that could bring us several new locations across the state. The RFP for the 1526 K building came out and it contains a

new provision that concerns us. The provision contains a window asking for any other monetary incentive in addition to rent.

We have completed an RFP on replacement of 49 vending machines at the rest areas along the interstate. This is a year-long project for 2014. It will include additional individualized training for the vendors involved.

NBE currently is offering catered lunches to four locations and may be adding others.

We have recently received a letter offering a two year renewal of our contract at the state office building.

NBE recently had a meeting with the National Guard at Camp Ashland. They are happy with our services and expect to offer a five year renewal of our contract in June of this year.

Randy Swanson, a vendor from Omaha passed away recently; and therefore, we need to find a new blind manager to run that site. Randy was the vendor for the Omaha Post Office which has about 49 vending machines.

Commissioner Jirak asked Carlos to describe the process from beginning to end for a person to get into the Vending program when they know absolutely nothing about the program.

Carlos Serván reported that the individual must be legally blind, a U.S. citizen, over 19 years of age and apply for services. The person is evaluated on basic skills such as math, English, social skills, management skills and they undergo a background check. The evaluation process may last up to three days. The individuals are then interviewed and asked about their goals and ambitions regarding running a business. The individual will then job shadow other blind vendors so they can learn more.

If no individual applies for a vacant vendor position then we will likely subcontract with someone to run the vending site until we find a client.

If someone is interested in running a vending site, they should come and visit with Carlos. The NBE team will work with the individual and support them as much as possible. If the individual needs some additional training we will work with them.

Update on Organizational Development Specialist and Potential Next Steps

Commissioner Hansen noted that as the Board has been discussing for several meetings, they entered a contract with an Organizational Development Specialist, Dr. Nancy Stelter. At the November 2013 Commission Board meeting the commissioners listened to a proposal from Dr. Stelter regarding the services she would provide. At that meeting the Board voted to accept Dr. Nancy Stelter's proposal and contract with her for the services outlined in her proposal.

Commissioner Hansen reported that Dr. Stelter has started her work on the services outlined in her proposal. To date she has met and talked with many Commission staff across the state and has some good discussions. The Commission Board met with Dr. Stelter last night and she gave a very high level report to the Board on some ideas that she has based on the feedback she has been receiving from staff members. Dr. Stelter did not go into any specifics as it is necessary to preserve confidentiality from the staff she has spoken to. Dr. Stelter will be speaking with the remaining staff in the near future. Dr. Stelter will then move forward and present some of her ideas to the Board and to NCBVI administration within the next few months. The process is moving forward and it is going well.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Lunch

A lunch break was taken at 12:00 noon.

The meeting resumed at 1:00 p.m.

Director Van Zandt stated that she hopes everyone enjoyed their lunch. She wanted to point out that the youth group which is on a training activity today are the individuals who made the lemon bars and brownies for today's meeting. Director Van Zandt apologized for not having the students all introduced earlier, but she did note that they enjoyed making the desserts.

New Business

Discuss & Act on 2015 State Plan

Director Van Zandt noted that at this time she cannot tell what may be different with the 2015 State Plan. Director Van Zandt stated that she has reviewed the needs that were identified in the Statewide Assessment Study. Clients, past clients, key informants and staff of the agency were interviewed during the study. As we look at all the different sections of the State Plan we will keep in mind this Assessment so we can build this into what we are doing.

Here are the things that were identified. Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI is already doing some of these things so we either may need to keep doing what we are doing or increase and improve what we are currently doing.

Services to consumers with multiple disabilities.

Services to minorities which includes race and ethnicity.

Employment related assistance.

Assistive technology.

Partnering with other organizations.

Services for consumers in rural areas.

The Assessment also identified some rehabilitation needs of individuals. These are the top five.

Instruction using computer assistive technology.

Training in assistive technology.

Instruction on low vision aids or devices.

Cane travel.

Exploring career options.

Specific to minorities, vocational rehabilitation needs that are different or that need special attention.

The top three needs were the same as the general listed above, but also included:

Instruction in general and personal home management.

Help in exploring career options.

The vocational rehabilitation needs of people or groups who are un-served or under-served. The only minority group that appears to be underserved by this Assessment are persons of Hispanic origin.

Needs of other components of the statewide work system. For the most part, either people are not aware of this system or we are already working pretty effectively with them.

Director Van Zandt reported that many of the items listed in the Assessment are already being addressed or will be addressed soon. The Commission is taking a deeper look at what we can do differently. Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI is in the process of creating a new position which in draft is called a Special Needs Counselor. This person will primarily be located in the Center but will also be available to the field. This individual will spend time with clients who have special needs such as multiple disabilities and English speaking or where there are barriers with blindness issues.

NCBVI has a vacant full-time position in the Center, but the census in the Center has been lower than it has been in a long time. There is not a current need to fill this position, but we are working on building the clientele in the Center. Therefore, we will work on the position's design and possibly filling the position during the upcoming months.

These items will be written specifically into the State Plan.

The Statewide Assessment will be posted to the NCBVI website. The 2015 State Plan will also be posted to the agency website after it is finalized. Director Van Zandt encouraged the Board and consumers to go through the Assessment and the previous State Plans and send to her their comments and suggestions. Director Van Zandt noted that the State Plan needs to be submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration by July 1, 2015. In the best case, the Commissioners can approve the State Plan at the May Board meeting. Director Van Zandt noted that she will be working on the State Plan and she will submit draft sections to the Board for review as she completes them.

Discuss & Act on Execution of Evaluation Process for the Executive Director

Chairperson Johnson stated she put this item on the agenda so the commissioners could decide how the executive director evaluation would be handled. Chairperson Johnson noted that there is a new evaluation tool which is a three part process. The board will need to decide who is assigned to what.

It was pointed out that at the November 2013 Commission Board meeting it was the consensus that the commissioners use their own evaluation tools for the upcoming May 2014 Executive Director Evaluation as has been done in the past. Each commissioner should collect their own data, use their own judgment, gather statistics and ask questions as they interact with staff members.

At this meeting the Board also voted to adopt the new executive director evaluation tool and have it become effective on July 1, 2014 with the understanding that revisions be made to it to make it specific to NCBVI. A job description and an action plan are also to be included.

Director Van Zandt reported that she has been going through the review process of the new evaluation tool which was developed by Vice Chair Jirak, Commissioner Walla and Paulette Monthei. Director Van Zandt has made some notes as it relates to what fits with the Boards structure and the quarterly meetings. Director Van Zandt stated that she will be sending her revised document to the Board for their review. Director Van Zandt noted that this new evaluation tool is far more time intensive on the part of the Board compared to what has been done in the past. It will be the Board's call as to if they want to revise the evaluation tool in any way before it is implemented.

Chairperson Johnson noted that as a Board they now need to decide how they wish to proceed. It was noted that an Executive Director job description needs to be developed. Commissioner Newman, Commissioner Jirak and Director Van Zandt are to work on developing the job description. Director Van Zandt was also asked to contact other states to obtain a copy of the job description they have for their executive director. The job description should be ready for approval at the May 2014 Commission Board meeting.

Chairperson Johnson noted that an Action Plan will also need to be created. The Action Plan should include items that are to be accomplished within the upcoming year. At the end of the year the commissioners will review this to see what has actually been accomplished. The Action Plan should be developed by the executive director and it should contain a list of goals for the upcoming evaluation period. For the purpose of the evaluation, the Action Plan would go from May 1 through April 30. This item will be back on the agenda for the May 3, 2014 Commission Board meeting.

Discuss & Act on Commissioner's Retreat

Chairperson Johnson asked that this item be placed on the agenda. She is thinking something that includes some training on agency matters, perhaps some leadership skills and time to get to know the new Commissioners so we all can figure out how to best work with each other. It would also be good for Robert and Becky to get better acquainted with what the board does and to ask questions.

Each of the offices, management and the center has retreat/training/meetings with just those groups' members. I think it's a good way to build working relationships and skills. The agenda item is meant to explore this idea and to see if there is interest in setting up something of this nature.

Commissioner Hansen pointed out that part of Dr. Nancy Stelter's plan is for the commission board to meet with her regarding the future of the Commission. This meeting is to take place after Dr. Stelter completes her study of the agency.

It was noted that the Commission Board should keep the rules of the Open Meeting Act in mind if planning a retreat. The Nebraska Open meeting Act guarantees that every meeting of a public body shall be open to the public in order that citizens may exercise their democratic privilege of attending and speaking at meetings of public bodies.

Meetings, for purposes of the open meetings statutes, are defined as "all regular, special, or called meetings, formal or informal, of any public body for the purposes of briefing, discussion of public business, formation of tentative policy, or the taking of any action of the public body." Section 84-1410(5) also provides that the open meetings statutes shall not apply to "chance meetings or to attendance at or travel to conventions or workshops of members of a public body at which there is no meeting of the body then intentionally convened, if there is no vote or other action taken regarding any matter over which the public body has supervision, control, jurisdiction, or advisory power."

Director Van Zandt noted that the Focus Topics at the Commission meetings are used as a tool to offer training to the board and to the public about what the Commission does. NCBVI also has an electronic Commission Board packet that contains a lot of information about the Commission. Each Commissioner has a copy of this packet which is stored on a flash drive.

The Commissioners unanimously decided to table this item until the May 2014 Commission Board meeting so they can have some additional time to think about how they would like to proceed and what areas they would like to receive more training on.

Public Comment

Barbara Loos – Barbara noted that as good as a Commissioner Retreat may sound, it is important to keep the Public Meeting Act in mind. Barbara thanked Pearl for reminding everyone how the Focus Topics at the meetings came into place.

Barbara stated that as it relates to the vending situation, Robert did mention that we did talk before about individuals being trained in obtaining the skills if needed. It is important for NCBVI to have confident blind people in the vending positions. A lot of times these are the blind individuals that the public sees the most. Barbara mentioned that the VA cafeteria use to be very good place, but now it has vending machines that are totally inaccessible. Barbara stated that she hopes that NCBVI gets this facility so that it will improve.

Barbara noted that she has concerns about NCBVI filling a Special Needs Counselor position. This reminds her of back in the 70's when there was talk about having a School for the Sensory Impaired. This was a proposal to have deaf and blind students in the same school because they all have a

sensory impairment. Barbara noted that these two areas are very different. A Special Needs Counselor would need to have skills in many different areas and seems to be almost impossible. Perhaps she doesn't understand this position well enough, but it does concern her. Barbara added that she does not care for the term "special needs."

Mark Bulger – Mark noted that he can recognize how committed the Board is to doing their jobs and doing them well. He thanked the Board for that. Mark cautioned the Board that sometimes good intentions can go too far. His concern is that they may be trying to take on more than they can accomplish.

Mark stated that it comes back to what the key indicators are. What is NCBVI supposed to be doing. NCBVI has a fixed number of dollars that should be used the best they can be, which is to serve the public and to follow the law. Mark added that he would like to see the Board give the Executive Director some empowerment so she can do her job and do it well.

Final Announcements

Commissioner Newman stated that he will be attending the ACB-N Convention in April. In that regard, Commissioner Newman asked that NCBVI reimburse him for the expenses of his attendance.

NCBVI's policy is any active board member may request financial reimbursement for attendance at two national and two state organization activities in their four-year term. This would include the state conventions of the ACB or NFB and national conventions of these two organizations.

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve reimbursing Commissioner Newman for his expenses while attending the ACB-N 2014 Convention.

Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion.

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

The next Commission Board meeting will be held on Saturday, May 3, 2014 at the Hampton Inn, Kearney, Nebraska. There will be no Focus Topic as the annual executive director evaluation will take place.

Commissioner Hansen welcomed Becky Rieken and Robert Newman to the Board of Commissioners.

Adjourn

Commissioner Hansen moved to adjourn the February 1, 2014 Commission Board meeting at 2:32 p.m. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the May 3, 2014 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Julie Johnson, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Focus Topic Documents
NCBVI Low Vision Services

INTRODUCTION:

Most of our clients are not totally blind and require some low vision services. We give the alternative and encourage blindness techniques or non-visual techniques, however, most of them prefer low vision equipment and training.

We partner with Low Vision providers for equipment and some training. These professionals come to our district meetings and bring their cutting-edge equipment. There is different kind of equipment according to the kind of residual vision and kind of activity the client is involved in.

Many of our low vision clients use both the non-visual and the low vision techniques and find that using both is more useful and safe.

Clients need to have the opportunity to learn to incorporate the use of their developing non-visual skills with their usable vision. Each client needs to come to understand those situations in which their vision works well and those situations in which the better choice would be to utilize the non-visual alternatives. This conclusion cannot be determined by anyone other than the client.

The National Eye Institute defines low vision as, "a visual impairment not correctable by standard glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, which interferes with a person's ability to perform everyday activities." Many people with low vision have age related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, or diabetic retinopathy. Of those with low vision, almost 45% have macular degeneration. Significant loss of vision is extremely common for older persons, since four of the five major causes of blindness are directly related to the aging process. The majority of blind and severely visually impaired persons are at or beyond retirement age.

Training in alternative or non-visual techniques enables people to continue doing what they once did using their sight. Assistive devices and simple adaptations can do much to help people deal more effectively with low vision.

NCBVI works closely with most low vision providers in the state. There is a low vision provider meeting which most of those providers attend 2-3 times a year. We learn of any changes in providers at that meeting. They are aware of us and the staff working at NCBVI and how they can contact us. Our Counselors or other staff have often presented to this group on how to integrate low vision with a cane and other non-visual skills. When our staff members do a presentation, they make the audience aware of the services we provide and that we can purchase low-vision equipment when individuals are eligible for our services. We also have low vision providers visit our offices to see what we provide and how we can work in partnership in providing the best services to their patients.

We have the vendors of low vision devices visit with staff 1-2 times a year about any new products that are available, so staff are aware of new devices to discuss with consumers.

In employment situations we do a job analysis and determine what low vision and non-visual techniques will aid the employee in performing their job duties. Both Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation clients are informed of the low vision providers with their contact information. If we send a client for a Low Vision Evaluation we do discuss the options and a consumer makes the choice of the provider.

We have a selection of low vision devices that we are able to demonstrate to clients both in our offices and in the field. In our client supply we stock low vision aids for independent living, such as bold line tablets, 20/20 pens, large print calendars, address books.

There are individuals we meet who find it difficult to make it out of their home and we will share options available to them. There are a few low vision providers that will travel to nursing homes, assisted living and visit people in their homes to provide a low vision assessment and recommend devices.

Most individuals we serve have some vision and we discuss low vision services and devices that might be of benefit to them. We purchase a great deal of screen enhancement software, magnifiers, CCTV, video magnification devices. These services are built into either the IPE (individualized plan for employment) or IPIL (individualized plan for independent living).

More and more doctor's offices employ an Occupational Therapist (OT) to work with patients with low vision techniques. The sessions are limited and often times are not referred on to us for follow up and discussion of how we can provide services that can augment the OT and also discuss a possible blend of low vision and alternative techniques in the event the person has a progressive vision loss. We have presented at the state Occupational Therapy conference and the State Optometric Association annual conferences and had a table to discuss individually with these practitioners on how we can work in tandem. Furthermore, we have contacted the Colleges that provide degrees in OT and will be presenting to graduating classes in the future.

Technology Program

Low Vision Services

The Technology Program at the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired serves Commission clients relative to services in their plan. Technology is procured based on an assessment and through adherence to the Technology Guidelines

The following is a description of how our Lincoln District Technology Specialist, Nancy Coffman, assesses a client's need for Low Vision Services.

Low vision Technology Services in the Lincoln district

As the Program Specialist for Technology Services in the Lincoln district, I work with clients to answer some important questions about how they will be likely to use their vision in the workplace. "low vision" covers a broad spectrum of eye conditions causing tunnel vision, central vision loss, floating spots within the visual field, Nystagmus, dependence on bright light, intolerance for bright lighting and glare and eye fatigue. Some of the questions I try to get answers for are:

- How large do you need print to be for optimal reading comfort and efficiency?
- How long can you read this size of print without fatigue?
- How far from the page or computer screen do you need to be for accurate and efficient reading?
- How does lighting and glare affect your ability to read print efficiently?
- How many words per minute are you able to read?
- What other options for reading and managing the information you need have been explored? Have you tried a screen reader and/or Braille output?
- If options have been ruled out, what has precipitated you ruling out those options?

As I work with the client to decide which technology solutions will work best for them, I consider several options. If a person needs to lean forward or get close to the screen to read print, how much magnification will be required to allow for good posture and a safe viewing distance from the monitor? Does a different color scheme help make the screen easier to see or less fatiguing to read over a long period of time?

I encourage clients to use a screen reader if they need magnification over 4X. We talk about the relationship between screen magnification and how much will actually fit on the screen at a time. Often people don't realize that if you have magnification set to 3X, you are getting a ninth of the screen. At 4X, you reduce your visual field to a sixteenth of the screen. The higher the magnification, the more movement will be required to view the same content. This conversation sometimes takes people by surprise.

A large monitor is an option for some. The larger the monitor, the less magnification will be required to achieve optimal print size. For some clients with visual field loss, spots in their visual field or conditions that make it necessary to scan a large surface, a large monitor is a poor option because in the average computing environment, the operator is too close to scan a large monitor effectively. We have seen this contribute to fatigue, headaches and neck pain.

In order to provide the best low vision services possible, I think it is important to make sure the client has the information necessary to make an informed choice about which technology will best meet his or her needs. For some, this may be a screen reader without a magnification component such as

JAWS. My experience is that when magnification is available, many will try to use vision for tasks that are easier and more comfortable to do with speech. For others, magnification with a good screen reader may be an optimal choice. This could be JAWS with MAGIC, JAWS with ZoomText or another combination of a screen reader and magnification program. MAGIC provides the basic elements of JAWS with a good suite of visual tools for magnification, focus tracking and color schemes. That is often my first choice if the person is going to be using speech with the magnification for backup. ZoomText, on the other hand, offers very good visual tools with the option to use speech when eye fatigue sets in or a long passage is quicker to read with speech. MAGIC and ZoomText are also good options when a person uses some applications that are not accessible with a speech only solution.

Clients are often lured toward magnification alternatives because they have become accustomed to using the mouse for navigating the computer. I highly encourage all clients to learn shortcut keystrokes for the programs they use so their hands do not need to move from the keyboard. Regardless of a person's level of vision, I hope to see basic typing ability so that keystrokes will be more easily learned. I have used tables with the layout of the key pads to help people remember which keys perform various functions on the keyboard. I rarely start people on a specialized keyboard with large letters because it enhances their tendency to look at the keys while typing and performing other functions.

When demonstration software is available, I give clients a copy to try. ZoomText has a 60 day trial and we have portable licenses for MAGIC if people need to evaluate it over a period of time outside the lab. Its evaluation license is only for 40 minutes at a time. Other magnification programs and screen readers also have evaluation copies available.

Another topic that is often a part of the conversation with clients is the necessity to take notes. Some are able to benefit from a 20/20 pen and paper; however, sorting through notes often becomes difficult for them. We are currently working with the PenFriend and other smart pen technologies to make auditory notes easier to navigate.

While I am teaching the access technology and mainstream programs the client plans to use, I introduce clients to help for the assistive technology they have chosen. Most programs have tutorials and webinars on their websites which are helpful for learning or reviewing features quickly. MAGIC and JAWS have books complete with audio and text that people can download for easy reference.

Although I demonstrate the Zoom feature on I-Devices, I have had few people choose that option. I have introduced clients to some of the free or inexpensive options for using their iDevice as an electronic magnifier. Applications for personal management, email, scanning and bar code recognition are also covered for people using iDevices. I also work with them on making the settings most user-friendly for them.

Although Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Orientation Counselors do most of the instruction with hand magnifiers and closed circuit televisions, I am available to help with those decisions as needed. Some people look at a scan and read system such as Kurzweil or OpenBook and decide it is more likely to meet their needs. We also have worked with the Prodigy which has speech and magnified output. I offer the same guidance with CCTV's as I do with computer magnification. I also have people work with them for several minutes to make sure the movement of the image on the screen is not going to cause motion sickness.

Throughout the state, demos and assessments help our technology specialists determine what type of technology will fulfill the needs of the clients. From a low-vision standpoint, each of our district technology specialists has access to leading Windows-based screen magnification software packages, ZoomText and magic. In addition, each of the Technology Specialists utilizes the Macintosh Computer which has access to both its built-in magnification software called Zoom, and a recently-released version of ZoomText for Mac. We also demonstrate magnification applications available on Mobile Devices, as well as hardware-based solutions that are strictly designed for magnification. Examples of these include the handheld Smart Lux from Eschenbach, the Ruby from Freedom Scientific, and the Prodigy Duo from Humanware. The Lincoln Office currently has a Prodigy Duo, which can either be used as a desktop CCTV or a handheld magnifier, which was provided as a

demo unit by Accessibility.Net. The Technology Team also participates in the AI Squared ZoomText trial campaign. As a part of this program, AI Squared periodically sends trials of their ZoomText software to the Agency for distribution to our clients who are interested in magnification software. In the Omaha district, it has been observed that the Ruby handheld magnifier has been popular over the past couple months. We have also noticed that low vision users of the iPhone will rely on applications that can be downloaded to that device to meet their magnification needs rather than carrying another unit like the Ruby. We believe this is because they are carrying the phone anyway and do not want to carry another device.

In each of the three districts, the breakdown of low vision clients served are as follows. In the Omaha District, 70% of the clients served by the technology program received Low Vision Services, and 30 percent did not receive low vision services. In the Lincoln District, 80% of the clients receiving technology services receive an assessment of their functional ability to use low vision services. In the North Platte District, Approximately 29 percent of clients received exclusively low vision services. 22% received exclusively non-visual access technology-related services. In some cases, clients worked on both non-visual access technology and low vision services as part of their plan. A majority of the clients worked on both categories of service, at 49%.

We have a few statistics related to spending for technology on low-vision services. Devices such as iPads, iPods, and computers that could be used visually or non-visually are coded in such a way that we are not able to determine whether they were purchased for low vision services. The same is true for adaptive software as all products such as JAWS, ZoomText, Magic, Duxbury, and other access technology software packages are coded into the same adaptive software category. One category of spending is Low Vision Aids, which includes magnifiers, CCTV's, or other devices that correct or enhance vision. This category, in Fiscal Year 2013, was 41% of the Rehab Technology budget and totaled \$63,838.78. One of our main vendors, Accessibility.Net, stated that over the past year, 12.5% of the products purchased were for low vision services and 87.5% of the purchases were non-visual access technology.

Below are some unedited testimonies from individuals who benefit from our Low Vision services:

Client 1: Donna K. R.

Jan. 13, 2014

I have been receiving services since July 2013. In Sept. 2013 I attended FYI in North Platte. I borrowed a 3.5X hand held magnifier and a 4X stand magnifier. I was then provided each for my permanent use. I use the hand held magnifier for reading labels in the grocery store, seeing plug-ins, seeing the buttons on the elevator and using the buttons on the microwave that have not been marked. The stand magnifier helps me read the newspaper and the phone book. I have a large print calendar that I love. I teach classes to people who are studying to get their insurance license. I tried using the other 2 magnifiers but they were very frustrating. The agency loaned me a Smart Lux to try out. It worked great. They gave me one to use permanently. I am able to continue to teach these classes.

Donna K. R.

Grand Island, NE

Client 2: Jena S.

To whom it may concern,

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Nebraska has been of great assistance to me. My name is Jena S. and I have Stargardt's disease. Which causes me to have low vision. I am a student at Concordia University in Seward, NE. Without the aid of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, I would struggle much more in my day-to-day life. For instance, this letter I am writing currently is done on a Mac laptop that the commission granted to me, this computer allows me to say what I want to be typed, zoom in to see the screen as large as I need, expand web pages, turn text to speech, and so much more. With my condition, my eyes become very tired after a long period of reading something, so I can highlight a text with my computer and have it read to me.

The Commission has also helped me acquire the program Kurzweil, which helps me with my school workloads when I have large reading assignments for school, I can use the program to help read audio texts. With this program, I can also zoom in to the book and read it more easily on my computer screen.

I am going into the field of Elementary Education and just finished up with my professional semester of student teaching for 16 weeks. I was able to get an iPad from the Commission, which has helped me greatly with my student teaching. If a text was too small, I could take a picture of it and zoom in as much as I needed. If I had the students looking up research items and the screen was too small, I could blow up the text size on my iPad. I could have the same features of text to speech and speech to text, which helped with lesson planning and teaching itself. It was great to have an accessible item in the classroom that I could carry around with me to help when something was too small of a font.

I also acquired an Onyx, which helps me with reading textbooks, and product labels that are printed in small font. The Onyx is very helpful when my eyes become tired from reading for making things a lot easier to read and less wearing on my eyes. It is very nice to use for reading notes, study-guides, and textbooks for school.

While at Concordia University, I have received financial support for my tuition and books, which is very helpful as a student at a private school.

I have also gotten a magnifying globe, which is very useful in reading a text in class or doing something quickly. It is easy to carry around and a huge help when reading a product label at a store, a small book, a paper, etc.

The Commission has also helped with the purchasing of the telescopic lens that I use for driving, without these glasses, I would not be granted my license and that would be very difficult for me. The telescopic lens helps me view things in the distance, road signs, and oncoming traffic.

After having had decided Elementary Education as my major, Larry helped put me into contact with other teachers in the Nebraska area who also have a visual impairment. I was able to talk with these individuals about how they accommodate for their impairment in the workplace. This helped me realize the avenues I could take to become the best teacher I can be.

Larry Mackey has been such a great help with my visual impairment and without the aid from the Commission, my day-to-day life would be a lot more difficult. I can never thank the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Nebraska enough!

Sincerely,

Jena S.

Client 3: Scott S.

My name is Scott S. I have low vision, and the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been an invaluable resource and necessary component to both my academic and professional success. Whenever a visual accessibility concern arises, Larry and Connie have been proactive and forthcoming in finding appropriate solutions.

I graduated from Concordia University with a BA in English and a BFA in Art. As the English program required copious amounts of reading, the Nebraska Commission provided both a CCTV and a dome magnifier, essential tools in eliminating eye fatigue and speeding up my reading to contend with course demands. These items were all the more crucial as I began to pursue my MFA in Creative Writing, which in the course of a two-year span required I read about 150 books. While studying art, the Nebraska Commission provided me with fundamental tools like a MacBook, software, and camera with zoom capabilities to complete graphic design, photography, and digital drawing projects.

As funds were low due to my inability to juggle both higher education and a job, expounded by my low vision, the Nebraska Commission assisted me with books and other course materials. I owe a great debt of gratitude for all of their assistance, which has served to alleviate much stress and provided a sense of confidence when pursuing a career with low vision. I'm now the first Writing Coach at Central Community College, where I assist students in more efficient expression of personal and socio-cultural values. In addition, I'm poetry editor of HOUSEGUEST Magazine, an online journal of art, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. I also host an online gallery called Dusk Avenue where I display photographs and graphic design work. I'm now experiencing the acquisition of my goals because of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Client 4: Maida A.

December 26, 2013

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Maida A. and I am a second year occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) student at Creighton University. I will graduate December of 2015 at which time I will be employable as an entry-level occupational therapist. As an undergraduate and professional student, I have used a variety of both low vision and alternative technology to aide me in my studies and career pursuits. These technologies include magnification software on my school laptop, handheld and video magnifiers for both up-close and distance viewing.

The purpose of the magnification software is to enlarge everything that is on my school laptop in order to quickly and efficiently complete my studies in order to prepare for a career in occupational therapy. The software that the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired provided is called ZoomText and has allowed me to be much more independent in an educational field that has become intensely dependent on technology. The Ruby handheld magnifier was designed to enlarge text and pictures up close for short to moderate lengths of time (i.e. <30 minutes). This piece of equipment has aided me in completing worksheets, reading and filling out documents especially patient documentation, and viewing pictures such as anatomical drawings and diagrams. It has been a great asset to me in participating in the daily tasks required throughout my education. Finally, the Transformer video magnifier aids in both long-distance and up-close viewing of people, objects, pictures, and text. This technology consists of a camera which connects to my laptop in order to display an image of what the camera is pointing at on the monitor of the laptop. It has been a great tool to use during lectures because it allows me to quickly transition between viewing what the instructor is writing on the board or demonstrating to the class and then back to my notes. It is also very lightweight which makes it very portable to take from class to class.

All of these items have been extremely advantageous to my success in both undergraduate and graduate school. Without the assistance of these pieces of equipment purchased by the Nebraska Commission for the blind and Visually Impaired, I do not believe that I would have been able to successfully earn my undergraduate degree from UNO or have access to all of the information needed to learn the practice of occupational therapy. I appreciate your continued support as I work to become a successfully employed blind individual.

Sincerely,

Maida A., Creighton University Doctor of Occupational Therapy Candidate Class of 2015

Client 5: Kathryn K.

Ashley, Larry, Nancy,

I cannot thank you and your team enough for the help you gave me prior to my surgery and the on-going support you are providing. Facing eye surgery that potentially leaves you blind for even a short time is a very scary place to be. Not only was I concerned about completing my normal activities of daily living but being able to maintain my work demands. You came and began to immediately ease my fears and apprehension...that you were there to help me maintain some normalcy in my life both personal and professionally and indeed could continue my job with adaptability devises. It was clear to me you cared about me as a person and about my ability to easily continue my job.

When Larry came to work with me, he quickly assured me that even IF I became blind there were assistive devices that would enable me to function close to the level of previous performance. He carefully and patiently showed me over and over again the different devices and key strokes needed on those devices for me to complete my work.

I am using ZoomText and a Pearl for scanning hard copy. It is allowing me to efficiently continue all my duties as Vice President of Patient Care for Alegant Health

There's a quote I'm very fond of....."Hope is not a strategy! Amateurs hope....Professionals work!"

Whenever someone is facing a major life change, an important component of that journey is hope...hope you can come through the event unchanged or at least with the ability to adapt easily to the changes. But hope is not enough...you need a plan. Not only did you and your team give me hope, but you calmed my fears, created an individualized strategy just for me and gave me a plan (tools and education) I could implement to make this potential major change less threatening and life-altering.

You discussed the tools, my options and listened to me. You help implement all that I needed. Your team and extended team are true professionals. I will be ever grateful for the hope, the strategy AND the professional way you helped me.

Sincerely,

Kathryn K., MSN. MBA

Vice President Patient Care Services

Alegent Health Services

Client 6: Chelsey A.

I am currently employed as a large animal veterinary technician with the Iowa State University. The duties of my job are performing some lab work, drawing up vaccines and medications, client consultation, cleaning and maintenance. I have the use of some low vision technology to aid in this. I use a Pent view LCD digital microscope for lab work. The microscope allows for maximum magnification up to 1600 X with the digital technology. I also use a syringe magnifier to put next to the syringe to get the correct dosage of vaccines and medications. I use a hand held magnifier for paperwork, charts, and reading medication bottles and dosages.

Chelsey A., Vet Tech

Client 7: Keri W.

I do use a few visual aids to help me on a daily basis. I wouldn't be able to do the things I do in my everyday live without them. I use a C.C. TV, a ruby, and Magic.

The C.C. T.V. helps me to read my mail. I also had to use it during school for my math and if there was something that was not very good with speech. I also use my C.C.T.V. for helping me to fill out any important forms that are not available on my computer.

I use my ruby also for reading my mail. It is also very helpful for looking at graphs in my school books. I also use it to read directions on things I cook for my family. I also use it while I am shopping to see things and prices on the shelf. It is very helpful to me.

The magic I use on my computer is also very helpful. I use magic for everything I do on my computer. It is a great help I am so glad to have these devices to help me out. I don't know what I would do without them. To be an independent person these items contribute a lot to that. I would not be as independent if I did not have them to help me out.

Sincerely

Keri W., Student

Client 8: Judy T.

December 31, 2013

I would not be able to do my job if it weren't for assistive technology. I currently use Zoom Text to enlarge print on the computer screen. I use the Acrobat CCTV to enlarge print on reading materials, documents etc. And I also use a Ruby Magnifier to help read files, inventory lists & any print that I need to read away from my desk. I am very Thankful for this adaptive equipment, because I would not be able to work as an Administrative Assistant without it. Therefore, I would be at home climbing the walls. I like to stay busy and help others. So, Thanks to the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired. They helped me look for a job and helped get the necessary equipment so I could do my job.

Judy T.

Administrative Assistant

NE. Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing

Client 9: Rachael V.

Low-Vision Techniques

Rachael V.

As a blind person, there are several alternate techniques. However, there are also different levels of blindness. I am a high-partial, meaning that I can see some things, but not others.

That being said, I have certain techniques that I use for completing my schoolwork, extra-curricular activities, projects and other such things that require my time and energy.

To get around campus, I use a long white cane. This allows people to know that I have a visual impairment and usually they give me some extra room. In my classes, I sit in the front row and ask for clarification when needed such as can you slow down or repeat what you said.

Several things I use are just simple common sense things. In school, I always email my instructors before the courses start, to alert them of my blindness and to ask that they use a 16 point font on handouts, and red ink when correcting papers. Sometimes I will use the testing center, which allows me 200% extra time on my exams.

I have also used magnification. I zoom in on my iPhone and make my word documents larger than 100%, and then when I'm done with them I return them to normal size and decrease the font.

I have discovered that what works quite well for me, is a monocular. I usually buy it myself, but it's tricky to find. It has probably been the best help, since it allows me to see the board the best.

Another thing that has helped me is color. I love highlighting for that reason. It jumps out at me so I see it better, which is why I'm so fascinated by neon colors. My eyes are directed to it automatically.

A bookstand in high school came in useful. I was able to use my laptop with my textbook propped up, instead of sitting on the table. It allowed for much easier and quicker reading. I prefer books to be propped up against something.

I use techniques sometimes, but not all the time. Most of the time I use the trial and error method, which seems to be the best method for me. If it's not working, I figure something else out. Sometimes it takes a few tries and can be frustrating, but I've got a stubborn streak in me that never allow me to give up on a challenge.

Client 10: Felecia C.

I really appreciate the commission providing me with tools such as; the Ruby Magnifier which assists me by magnifying images which allows me to better see images which normally are difficult to read. This assists me on a daily basis with everything from being able to see numbers on checks and credit cards to help with math because I can now see numbers and decimal points whereas before this was extremely difficult. I cannot make you understand how many times in the process of solving a problem with a decimal point or a comma I would end up with the incorrect answer because I could not see these two symbols. With the magnifier this is no longer an issue. Now in math class I no longer get these types of problems wrong usually my answers are correct. Therefore I am truly grateful for the use of the magnifier.

The use of Dragon naturally speaking helps me greatly since I have been diagnosed with neuropathy. I used to be able to type 70 words a minute with no errors. With Dragon NaturallySpeaking I now am able to increase my typing speed and accuracy which makes my life so much simpler. This program helps me with English, with letter writing and in every aspect of my life. I truly appreciate this program. To me Dragon naturally speaking is worth every penny it costs.

I am utilizing Talking Typing Teacher because I am still trying to learn how to type without the use of Dragon naturally speaking. I am making progress but it is a slow process as I still cannot feel the typing keys the way I did in the past.

I appreciate the fact that whenever I need help Larry comes to assist me.

The commission got me a Victor Reader Stream to help me with downloading books, webcasts, music and magazines schoolbook's and the Stream also helps me to record information so that I can remember things.

I have short term memory issues. The Victor Stream is very hard for me to understand. Sometimes I have I forgotten how to use the stream but all I have to do is call up the commission and you have called or send someone out to help me to remember how to use the stream again

I cannot speak for anyone but myself but every single tool you have provided me has made my life easier at work at school and just in everyday living. I'm so grateful because you taught me things such as how to walk with a cane so I would not fall down the stairs in my house. You taught me how to use Victor reader Stream and how to use Typing Teacher and so many other tools. Because of this my life and the quality of life for me has been enriched. No matter how many times I say thank you it would never show how truly appreciated you and the staff at the commission for the blind and visually impaired are appreciated.

Please note that the works you do the instruments and tools you provide to people such as me are greatly needed so again I say thank you and keep up the good work.

Felecia C., Student, & Assistant to Fund Developer, Outlook Nebraska, Inc.

Client 11: Rita F.

I am retired from the phone company and live with my son who is deaf blind and works full time. I our take care of our apartment, cook meals and do the grocery shopping. I use a walker and Moby which is a part of our bus system.

For shopping I use a bold line tablet and 20/20 pen. Sometimes I use a writing guide also. I use a magnifier to assist me with independent living. This helps me with mail, recipes, medicine.

I also have a daughter and son-in-law that are deaf blind and I assist them in going to doctor's appointments. The magnifier assists me with reading and explaining information to my family. I continue to go to get together with family and friends.

Rita F.

Client 12: Joan R.

I spoke with Joan on the phone about her low vision devices she uses at work. She told me about them because she has had eye surgery on both eyes and isn't able to use her computer at this time until she heals.

Joan R. is a counselor at Catholic Charities. She told me she uses ZoomText on dual monitors. She said the ZoomText is the best software and it has made her job a lot easier. She uses hand held magnifiers for printed materials. She also loves how we taught her how to use the Zoom magnifier on her iPhone. She said she doesn't know what she would have done at work without our help.

Thanks!

Sincerely,

Carol Jenkins

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II

Client 13: Tracy G.

I am a Teacher of the Visually Impaired at the Colorado School for the Deaf & Blind. My primary responsibility is working with transition students and career services. I use mostly low vision techniques both personally and professionally.

I have a CCTV, for assisting with any paperwork and reading that I need to do.

I employ ZoomText on my windows computer and zoom on the MAC. I have an IPHONE and use the magnification app on it and other low vision applications.

Since first completing school I have used bi-optics for driving.

Since it is necessary to know both low vision and non-visual technology in order provide instruction to students, I am learning as a professional that it is nice to have a blend of techniques. I am learning to utilize the reader feature on ZoomText and voice over on my IPHONE and MAC.

Tracy G.-TVI

Client 14: Kristen W.

I am currently a student at Creighton University. The Commission has provided me with many tools to make various aspects of my education easier. My program is a computer based program meaning that all information in on university provided computers. This includes tests, assignments, and lectures. ZoomText has been a wonderful tool it not only making the image on the screen larger, but also providing the reading feature to read long documents and websites. Also for my computer I was provided with the PEARL camera and OpenBook software. These two pieces allow me to scan and read paperwork as well as textbooks that I only have in print. The real-time feature will be useful in the future when I am doing paper document for clinical rotations.

I use a Ruby HD XL for small reading tasks such as a single letter document, papers during lab at school, and everyday tasks that come up that I need the magnification.

Lastly, my iPad and Bluetooth keyboard have been an amazing resource. I use the keyboard with the iPad for typing emails such as this one, taking notes, and internet searching. The iPad also provides me with the capability to read my books digitally. Additionally iBooks allows me to turn my written book into spoken words with a single tap of the screen. The iPad makes doing research for school easy as it is easy to magnify and navigate with the zoom feature enabled.

Additionally I was provided with a large monitor screen that I can attach my iPad and computer to make reading materials on these devices easier. Kristen W.

Client 15: Randy S.

I am a licensed blind vendor at the Omaha Main Post Office. I operate over 50 vending machines and several bulk vendors.

My computer has ZoomText. I use this computer for sending e mails to suppliers for orders, contacting salesmen about deliveries and issues with vending machines. I do my own accounting and post information from invoices in the computer. I also use my accounting program to automatically print out checks to pay suppliers and staff.

Some larger companies now have their ordering done entirely on line, so the computer has taken the place of salesmen that used to call on me, times are changing.

I input invoices on a daily basis. Once a month, we read all of the vending machines meters and do monthly reports.

I maintain a large inventory of product and use bold Sharpie pens (1/4 inch wide) to mark product cases.

To read invoices and other printed information, I use a CCTV.

I have a staff working with me and I do payroll and issue pay checks.

Because I am deaf/blind, it's a bit hard to communicate at times. My customers know this, and write notes down for me with a 20/20 pen or a Sharpie pen. My staff also writes a lot of notes for me. I can also use sign language (mostly fingerspelling) to communicate with people. Because of my limited vision, people fingerspell close to my face so I can read their fingers.

I also have a Ruby, which I use for reading the vending machine menus on site. All vending machines are computerized and some of them have menus with very small print. They are also making vending machines now that have flat (non tactile) selection panels. These are a bit awkward to read, a lot like an iPad.

Randy S.

Client 16: Jane F.

I have worked at a major university in the health science library for over 35 years. I am responsible for ordering books for this facility. In 2013 I started struggling with my employment. Staff at the commission worked with me and my employer to determine the software that would work best for me to continue my employment. They worked with me on the job to learn how to use ZoomText to successfully do my job. I also have a ZoomText keyboard for entering information into the computer that makes it easier for me to readily find the needed keys.

Technology does not come easily for me as someone that is older and has worked a majority of my career in an environment without having to use computers it has been hard for me. It was hard as I work with both Windows and MAC.

I do have a Topaz XL CTV and find this very helpful and a handheld magnifier to assist me with reading correspondence and print material.

I do have a long white cane as I travel to and from work and in the community. I do not want to fall as it would impact my ability to continue to live independently.

But I am still working as this job is an integral part of my life and proud to work for the academic institution for as long as I have.

Jane F.

Client 17: Tim J.

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Tim J. Currently, I am a client with the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I have worked with several of the counselors in the Omaha office. As a result, I have experienced a large amount of success toward attaining my career goals while living in the state of Nebraska.

In 1993, I became a client of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired after relocating to Omaha, NE. At that time I had a significant amount of vision which enabled me to use low vision aids like the CCTV to complete activities such as reading and completing applications. I did not utilize many other low vision tools despite having previously completed orientation training approximately three years prior to coming to Omaha. In 1994, I was introduced to Zoom Text upon being hired as an Academic Advisor at a local college in Omaha. I have since been employed with several organizations in the Omaha Metropolitan area and continued to use a combination of Zoom Text and the CCTV for my personal and business use.

At the present time, I have transitioned from the use of low vision tools like Zoom Text and the CCTV to blindness software like JAWS, the BookSense XT and the white cane. I have no more use for the CCTV. As a result of this transition, I have been able to maintain a high level of performance on my job and continued independence in my personal life.

The transition has been relatively smooth with the help of the NCBVI staff in the Omaha office. Of course, I could never have accomplished any of my current success without the help of God. God is the source from which all of my help has come! I am grateful for any and all help that has been provided through the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Sincerely,
Tim J.

Client 18: Bret G.

Over the past year, the Commission has assisted me in a plethora of ways to enable me to more readily perform daily tasks at school and at home. Some of the assistive technology I utilize regularly include a Ruby for reading small print and for physical examination in clinical settings, connective cables to allow me to use the camera on my iPad as a portable and functional CCTV, and a digital otoscope for otoscopic examination of the tympanic membrane and ear. The latter has been used

extensively in the clinic with great success. Patients, parents, and doctors are impressed and I am readily able to visualize necessary structures for physical exam. Additionally, the Commission made me aware of audio books available through NLS/BARD which have proven highly enjoyable. Also, I was made aware of the potential for a discounted bus pass making me much more independent, not needing to rely on my wife for a ride to and from school each day.

A piece of equipment I utilize regularly, purchased by the university rather than through the Commission, is a Merlin CCTV. While some textbooks are available in digital formats, many are not. The CCTV makes it possible for me to more easily complete some of my extensive reading for school. It is an old, but mostly functional CCTV for which I am very grateful to be able to use at school.

I am grateful for all of the support and assistance provided by the Commission.
Bret G.

Client 19: Gerry

Gerry was a successful general contractor in the North Platte area before losing his vision after a massive stroke in November 2011. Deciding he could no longer do the work he once loved; he began applying at different retail locations. In November 2012 his efforts paid off and he was hired at Karl's TV and Appliance as a stock clerk. At first Gerry used a hand-held magnifier to read codes on merchandise; however he soon discovered that the larger appliances stored above his head couldn't be reached or read using the small magnifier. Pat Fischer with Accessibility.net was in town at that time and stopped by to show Gerry a Ruby Video Magnifier. With the Ruby, Gerry was able to take a picture of the code and then bring it down to his level to see the magnified text. With the Ruby Gerry could also enlarge the text to different degrees of magnification, store the captured text for later viewing, or read user manuals for assembling merchandise.

Gerry has been using the Ruby for over a year now and never leaves for work without it clipped to his belt. Also with Gerry's renewed confidence he's back to doing contracting work a couple of times a week with his former company! He says with the help of NCBVI and the tools he's been given he is now able to provide for his family.

Client 20: Charlotte

Charlotte began losing her vision in 2008 and although she has had to give up driving she wasn't willing to give up anything else such as keeping her own books. She had always done this for her husband's farming business and it was something she enjoyed even after he passed away. When Charlotte was first diagnosed with Macular Degeneration she purchased an Onyx CCTV for herself. She was still working part time for an account and could transport the Onyx to and from work. Due to other health problems Charlotte had to give up her part time job and soon thereafter the Onyx CCTV stopped working. Since then, Charlotte's vision has wavered making it difficult to rely on magnification alone.

Charlotte had heard about the DaVinci and got a demonstration from Mark Neumeier with Magnification Resources. Instantly Charlotte fell in love with the DeVinci's dual capacity to either have text read aloud or read it on the screen. This way if her vision wasn't doing as well that day she would have the option to read it aloud. She knew this would really assist her in continuing her book work and remaining independent in her own home. Charlotte was only able to pay for half of the unit because of her limited income, so NCBVI was able to assist her with the other half of the cost. Charlotte uses her DaVinci daily and can't imagine living alone without it!

Client 21: Donna

Comment from Donna from Sidney - was first a VR client then an IL client, now closed. She used a CCTV, hand held magnification & Zoom text on the job site (Cabela's billing center) and received low vision training from Angie. She now uses the CCTV and hand held in her daily life.

"It (CCTV, magnifier and Zoom text) helped me keep my job until I had to retire because of my mom's and husband's health. I still use them all the time at home for mail and all my daily needs like grocery shopping and that type of thing. I don't know where I'd be without them and your help."

Client 22: Jacob

Comment (copied and pasted from a message) from Jacob, high school student from Oshkosh in the VR tract who Jan and Angie have worked with on hand held magnification, CCTV, both IOS & Windows magnification applications and software.

Jacob states, "you guys have helped me find new ways of doing things like reading and being independent at school with the technology and you guys have got me involved with other blind youth by keeping me up to date on the programs"

Client 23: Whitney

Whitney, a student in the athletic training program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney says that "The equipment I use includes ZoomText, a hand-held magnifier, a victor-reader, and the blue transparent sheets that I put over papers to read. I have also have a kindle fire that I purchased on my own that I use a lot because I can download books and make the print as big as I want. I never use my computer without ZoomText, that has probably been the most beneficial device I currently have. I sometimes use my victor reader, rarely use the magnifier and often use the transparent sheets."

Client 24: Rebecca

Rebecca, a student at the Creative Center College for Art and Design in Omaha is studying graphic design. She writes "I have been a client of the commission for the Blind for almost eight years.

During this time I have learned many different skills and ways to accommodate myself and become an independent person.

Throughout elementary and middle school I struggled to understand what I was being taught because of my visual impairment. The commission loaned me a cctv onyx desktop system which I still use everyday to read papers and even see long distance things such as projectors. I was also given large print books so I could read my text books without bending over my desk. Two summers ago I participated in a program called wages where I had a part time job at the Humane society in the morning and doing independent living training at the Center. During my training I learned how to travel using the bus systems and learned to use cane travel. I also relearned how to read braille and cook and clean without using any vision. I have gained so much from the commissions help. They helped give me the confidence to live independently and go to college.

When the Sleep-shades Aren't On

INTRODUCTION

While there are many very good reasons for the use of the sleep-shades during Center training, there are also situations that can create confusion for students. It is not unusual for people to wonder why the sleep-shades are used at all; in fact, there have been many that strongly oppose their use, and for these reasons there have already been several articles written to address these concerns. (Olson, 1982; Mettler, 1997; see also: Omvig, 2002-2005) The Nebraska Center for the Blind is firmly committed to the use of sleep-shades as a teaching tool because years of experience have shown that this approach to training leads to a higher level of independence and success, and therefore, requires students to wear the sleep-shades eight hours a day, five days a week. On the other hand, this can also sometimes lead to questions as to why students are not required to wear them throughout their waking hours if they are such an important part of the learning process. This certainly opens up many other questions, especially knowing that Center students with some degree of usable vision will tend to use it when it is available to them. For this reason this article was prepared with the intent of answering some of these questions. (Olson, 1982; Mettler, 1997)

There are actually two answers for the question regarding those times when students are not required to use the shades. It simply wouldn't be comfortable for students to wear the sleep-shades for such extensive periods, and it is recognized that there is a physical need to have a break from the shades. The second reason is in fact an important part of the learning process. Center students need to have the opportunity to learn to incorporate the use of their developing non-visual skills with their usable vision. Each student needs to come to understand those situations in which their vision works well and those situations in which the better choice would be to utilize the non-visual alternatives. This understanding cannot be determined by anyone other than the individual student, and it is just as important as developing a complete set of non-visual techniques. (Olson, 1982; Mettler, 1997)

Other questions include, why are students with a high degree of usable vision required to use their canes when they are not wearing the sleep-shades, or why students with relatively high levels of vision are discouraged from using their vision to work with the computer at the apartments? Why should a student that does not have enough vision to read print have to go to the trouble of arranging for a sighted reader when there are other Center students available at the apartments that have enough vision to read print and are willing to help out with the reading? Why should a student with some useful vision not use his or her vision to assist a totally blind student or a staff person with finding a dropped object, locate a chair, announce when a traffic light has changed to green, or set an alarm clock? Does this mean that the staff of the Center believes that blind people with some vision shouldn't use their vision?

RATIONALE

As confusing as the Center's policies may appear to be at first, there are very good reasons for each of them. While the overall goal of any rehabilitation training program is to prepare individuals to obtain appropriate employment, one of the most important purposes of Center training is to assist agency clients to become experts in their own blindness. This means being able to make informed choices regarding techniques they will use in their everyday lives as well as in the work place. For some situations a visually based alternative may be more efficient while others may be better accomplished using a non-visual method. (Olson, 1982) An individual cannot make an appropriate choice of techniques unless that person becomes well practiced with those methods that would otherwise be unfamiliar. Most often, since the majority of people rely on their vision for the tasks of everyday life or in the work place, the less familiar set of techniques tend to be those that are non-visual in nature. It is only once an individual has truly mastered the less familiar non-visual techniques that a balanced

comparison can be made with the more familiar and socially accepted visually based methods. (Jernigan, 1961)

During Center training, students are expected to use their canes at all times except when they are in their own apartments. The reasons for this policy are really very simple and important. First of all, individuals with limited vision need to learn which method of gathering information is most effective in their personal situation, the cane and its related non-visual techniques or their eyesight. They must also learn to use both sources of information in concert with each other. This means learning through experience, making mistakes, and experimenting to find the best combination of these skills. Cane travel is a skill that requires practice, and the time in Center classes simply doesn't provide enough practice alone. In addition, each individual must come to terms with the social issues using a cane can create. The general public tends to react to a person with a white cane and often these reactions are socially awkward, ranging from being excessively helpful to outright strange. When it becomes apparent that the blind individual has some useful vision, the interaction can be even more uncomfortable, causing the blind person to feel self-conscious even if most people do not react at all. Using the cane in nearly every situation provides Center students with the experience to make good judgments regarding which skills best meet their needs, to learn to blend visual and non-visual skills together effectively, to refine their cane techniques, and to develop positive responses to even the most awkward of social situations related to their blindness.

The experiences that students have while staying at the apartments are as much a part of the training as are the classes during the week. Developing new skills, such as operating a computer using synthesized speech and keyboard commands, require far more extensive practice than can be provided in classes. For this reason, a computer is provided for students to use in the apartments and often homework assignments are given by Center instructors. For example, students that employ their vision to work with the computer, whether it involves a screen enlargement program or not, are not practicing the non-visual techniques and may even tend to compare their well-developed visually based computer skills with their very limited experience with the use of keyboard commands and listening skills. It would be very easy for these students to become convinced that using a computer visually is a superior method, even though in reality many non-visual computer techniques are much more efficient. It is also not uncommon for a student with some useful vision to attempt to assist a student that is unable to visually read the computer screen. The problem with this seemingly kind gesture is that neither student learns the non-visual techniques to accomplish the task.

Learning how to obtain and work with a reader is one of the most important skills that a blind person can develop. When other Center students jump in to help with reading for other students, they are denying them the opportunity to learn many aspects of this skill. Even more troubling, this could reinforce in the minds of both students the notion that the more vision a person has, the better off that person is. The truth can be very easily overlooked, because the other characteristics that are truly responsible for a person's success are not considered. A well-educated, highly skilled, and motivated blind person is much more likely to be successful than any apathetic individual with eyesight who has not had the opportunity for education or to develop critically important skills, and therefore, it is not vision that determines the outcome, but rather all of the experience and characteristics that are a part of that person's make up. (Olson, 1982; Jernigan, 1961; See also Omvig, 2002-2005; and Omvig 2005)

CONCLUSION

Each of the skills that are a part of Center training, including finding a dropped object, locating a chair, knowing when a traffic signal has changed, or correctly setting an alarm clock, are the sort of daily tasks that underpin an individual's independence. Every Center student needs to find the best alternatives to accomplish these sorts of tasks if he or she is going to be able to live in the world and

be a contributing member of society. Nonetheless, there is something much deeper at work here, which is the need to believe in the ability of all blind people. When an individual with vision performs a task for someone with less vision, it takes away the sense that functioning as a blind person is not only possible but of equal merit. (Jernigan, 1961; Jernigan, 1993; See also: Omvig 2005 pp. 210-234) When a student with some vision steps in to assist a blind staff member, it takes away the opportunity for that staff person to role model the non-visual techniques and attitudes necessary to be successful as a blind person.

The emphases on the development of non-visual techniques can sometimes cause some clients and others to misinterpret the intended purpose of the agency's approach to training, leaving them with the impression that staff members are opposed to the use of low-vision techniques and devices. The philosophy of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired actually promotes the use of low-vision techniques and devices in the appropriate circumstances. (Olson, 1982) In fact, the agency was for many years a major sponsor of the low-vision clinic at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha and continues to purchase low-vision devices when appropriate for meeting the needs of individual clients. Also, NCBVI field staff have received training in appropriate low-vision assessment techniques and services for working with agency clients, especially in regard to the senior blind.

There is one critical aspect of the philosophy of the agency that allows the non-visual Structured Discovery training model to work effectively with low-vision techniques and devices, and this is related to the manner and timing in which low-vision related methods is introduced to consumers. Vision is such a compelling sense, both based on social acceptance and personal familiarity, that people will tend to focus their attention on the use of their vision should low-vision techniques and devices be introduced too early in the rehabilitation process. This focus on visually based techniques and devices can create a sense that the challenges related to vision loss are best addressed through these methods when in fact some, if not the majority, of the individual's daily tasks, may well be completed more efficiently, effectively, and even more safely through non-visual alternatives. (Olson, 1982)

Informed choice is a critical aspect of successful rehabilitation, and only a consumer that is fully knowledgeable regarding the complete range of possible non-visual and low-vision alternative techniques can make a truly informed choice regarding which technique will best meet that person's needs in a given situation. The only way to be truly informed regarding non-visual techniques is through developing a true mastery of these skills so that a fair comparison can be made with the more familiar visually based skills. This proper development of the new non-visual alternatives is unlikely should an individual be provided with very appealing low-vision techniques before the non-visual techniques are fully developed, since the consumer will likely mistakenly assume that no further skill development is needed. For this reason, the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired emphasizes the development of non-visual skills before low-vision alternatives are introduced. Throughout this process, individual needs and abilities are considered, and the approaches to training are adjusted through informed choice so that these needs are most appropriately met. Center training, for example, is a choice, which is intended to specifically assist consumers to develop the highest level of proficiency in the complete complement of non-visual skills, and low-vision training and devices is simply not a part of this program. An individual that makes the choice of using low-vision based alternatives can have access through the agency to a qualified low-vision specialist, home based instruction, or other training resources. It should also be pointed out that developing effective non-visual techniques through Structured Discovery learning experiences can actually enhance an individual's use of low-vision. This is the case because using non-visual techniques, for example the long white cane to avoid obstacles, can free up the person's vision to be used for locating useful landmarks at a distance or observing the movements of other pedestrians. Also, the highly developed problem solving skills that result from Structured Discovery learning

experiences can directly improve an individual's ability to learn to use the available visual information more efficiently and effectively.

Being blind really means that an individual does not have reliable eyesight; therefore, the individual needs to devise an effective and efficient set of alternative techniques in order to successfully perform the majority of his or her daily tasks. Individuals with some usable vision that also have a highly refined set of non-visual skills have the ability to seamlessly transition from visually based techniques to those that do not require vision whenever conditions are adverse to the use of their vision. Those persons that primarily rely on low-vision techniques may simply not have the ability to adapt effectively or safely to conditions that are adverse to the use of their eyesight. (Olson, 1982, Mettler, 1997)

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Making NCBVI the Best We Can Be The Provision of Low Vision Services

1. What is the Commission's stated mission, or policy, for the provision of low vision services?

In accordance with state law, NCBVI serves all individuals with a visual impairment so severe as to preclude the achievement of vocational goals or participation in the activities of daily life. This criterion recognizes that the vast majority of individuals served by NCBVI have some functional vision. While there is no specific stated mission or policy regarding provision of low vision services, the need for such services are typically determined during the intake process and provided accordingly.

a. What are the differences in the provision of low vision services provided by the Vocational (VR) and Independent Living (IL) programs?

In both cases, the provision of all services, including low vision services, is outlined in and individualized service plan developed for the achievement of specific vocational or independent living goals. The primary difference between the provision of low vision services to clients in the VR or IL track is the limitation on the amount of time counselors or technology specialists can commit to training in the use of assistive technology. The time counselors and technology specialists can commit to serving clients must be in accordance with the proportional allocation of funds for the VR and IL programs. Consequently, since funds for the IL program are considerably less than those for the VR program, counselors and technology specialists cannot commit more than a few visits for the purpose of training clients in the use of assistive technology. This does not, however, prevent counselors and technology specialists from providing low vision services to clients requiring relatively little training, such as in the use of magnification devices.

2. Evaluation of the Consumer's Needs:

a. What is the evaluation process like for determining what equipment and/or training will be provided?

The spectrum of low vision services run from the simple to the sophisticated. Counselors routinely distribute low vision aids such as handwriting guides, large print address books, bold-line writing tablets, stick-on locator dots, tinted overlays, and the like to new referrals. These items are inexpensive and kept in Discretionary Supply for distribution to the various offices as needed. Many clients (or people inquiring about services) are interested in magnification devices. All of the offices operated by NCBVI have low vision kits or demonstration devices provided by vendors such as Magnification Resources and Eschenbach. If clients express an interest in low vision devices, they may be referred to an eye care professional for a low vision evaluation; the Low Vision Clinic at UNOMC in Omaha is often referred to. In more rural areas, referrals to eye care professionals who can conduct low vision evaluation may not be readily available. While NCBVI can and have paid for the cost of transporting clients from across the state to providers of low vision evaluations, many do not choose to make the trip. In such cases, clients will be loaned low vision devices to try out at home. If the client is satisfied, they will be given the item to keep. It should be noted that Magnification Resources, a private vendor based in Lincoln, will visit clients in their homes across the state to demonstrate various low vision devices. NCBVI and Magnification Resources, and other vendors such as accessibility.com in Omaha, have worked together on behalf of clients needing low vision services.

b. Who provides this evaluation: NCBVI staff, a low vision specialist?

This question can be best answered in a letter Dr. Van Zandt sent in September 2002 in response to a letter sent by the Nebraska Board of Optometry expressing concern over the provision of low vision services by NCBVI counselors lacking the proper training and credentials. No further concern was expressed by the Nebraska Board of Optometry or organization of eye care professionals following this exchange. Please see Dr. Van Zandt's response to the Nebraska Board of Optometry attached at the end of this document.

c. When is an exam by a specialist called for, and who decides this?

As a routine part of the intake process, new referrals are informed about low vision techniques as well as non-visual alternatives. On the basis of the initial determination of need, the client may wish to explore low vision aids and devices beyond what NCBVI is able to provide. At that point, a referral is made for a low vision evaluation. NCBVI will pay for the cost of transportation in some cases; the low vision evaluation; and low vision devices, within reason, as recommended by the low vision specialist.

d. When a NCBVI staffer performs the evaluation, what does that exam consist of?

NCBVI Does not employ low vision specialists or conduct low vision evaluations.

e. What does the training consist of for staff who are expected to make these evaluations?

Again, NCBVI counselors and technology specialists do not provide low vision evaluations. Training, however, has been provided to staff members regarding diseases of the eye and problems created by low vision. Elaine Rivera, in particular, was contracted to provide training on low vision services at the district level in late 2011. This training did not focus on diagnosis or prescription of aids or devices. Rather, it focused more on creating a greater awareness of how these aids and devices can promote greater independence through manipulation of light conditions to make things appear "bigger, bolder, or brighter." Also, vendors of low vision aids and devices frequently conduct demonstrations of new products at the district and office level to keep staff members aware of emerging technologies.

f. Are staff who are expected to make these evaluations being evaluated for their level of expertise?

No. NCBVI Does not employ low vision specialists or conduct low vision evaluations.

3. Purchase of equipment:

a. What are the funding sources used for the provision of low vision services for VR and IL programs, respectively? (Example: where does the money come from, and what are the limitations.)

Federal funds for low vision services for clients in the VR track are provided through Title I and VI of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended). Low vision services for clients in the IL track under the age of 55 are funded through Title VII Part B of the Rehabilitation Act; IL clients 55 years old and older are provided low vision services through Title VII Chapter 2 of the Rehabilitation Act.

NCBVI will pay for the cost of low vision services, including aids and devices and training, so long as such services support the achievement of vocational and independent living goals specified on the individualized service plan. The extent to which low vision services may be provided, particularly for those in the IL track, are limited by the amount of time staff members can commit to the provision of such services.

There is a state match for federal funds (78.7% federal and 21.3% state for VR services; 90% federal

and 10% state for IL services). These funds can also be used to cover the cost of low vision services.

PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha) is a program funded by the Enrichment Foundation since 2007. This grant provides funding for assistive devices and services, including low vision services, promoting greater independence for individuals with disabilities living in Sarpy and Douglas Counties. These funds may not be used to cover the cost of operational or administrative expenses or for vocational services. NCBVI was recently awarded \$10,000 in support of PILBO in calendar year 2014.

b. What are the criteria for the purchasing of equipment and training, within the VR and IL programs, respectively? (Examples: When low tech, when high tech? Nature of the tasks and/or service plan goal?)

The need for services, whether low tech or high tech, is determined after the initiation of an application for services during the period of evaluative services prior to the development of an individualized service plan. A Technology Specialist will assess the need for high tech or electronic equipment and make recommendations for the purchase of equipment supporting the attainment of potential vocational goals. Technology Specialists typically do not assess the need for low tech aids and devices.

The process for determining the need for assistive technology and training in its use is essentially the same whether clients are in the VR or IL track. The major constraint on services provided to clients in the IL track is the amount of time counselors and technology specialists can commit to the provision of these services. In some cases, individuals with the necessary technical skills have been contracted to provide the services and training NCBVI counselors and technology specialists cannot.

c. Do consumers contribute to the purchase of equipment? If so under what criteria?

NCBVI does not employ a financial means test to determine a client's ability to pay for services or equipment. Consequently, clients are not asked to contribute to the cost of equipment issued to them. On occasion, however, clients express a desire for equipment more sophisticated or more expensive than equipment counselors or technology specialists would otherwise recommend to meet the specific need. In such cases, NCBVI may cover the cost of the equipment desired up to the cost of the recommended equipment, the balance to be paid by the client. This, however, is a relatively rare event.

d. Is there a return policy, volunteer or non-volunteer? (How would returned equipment be redistributed?)

Equipment issued to clients become the property of the client upon case closure. NCBVI does not track low vision aids or devices issued to clients after case closure, and former clients are not required to return equipment to NCBVI if that equipment no longer proves to be of benefit to them. Former clients, however, often want to donate equipment they can no longer use back to NCBVI. If the equipment is undamaged and in good working order, NCBVI may take the equipment back for redistribution to other clients.

e. How does the decision of which vendor to purchase from, come about?

Factors such as cost of specific items and customer service are primary consideration. NCBVI does not dictate which vendors the agency will do business with. This is often determined by the relationship vendors establish with counselors and technology specialists across the state. If counselors and technology specialists are satisfied with the services provided by a particular vendor,

the chances are good that the business relationship will continue.

f. What are the policies and or criteria for evaluation, purchase and training, when the consumer is a student between the grades from first through twelfth, or for a college student?

It is the primary responsibility of the school to provide low vision services and equipment to blind and visually impaired students up to the age of 21. NCBVI may work with vision resource teachers, educators, and other school officials in a consultative capacity as needed. Requests for low vision aids and devices and other assistive technology may be referred to the Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children. On occasion, NCBVI counselors may work with students after school hours if more individual training on alternative skills is needed, but this infrequent and often does not involve low vision aids or devices.

Clients pursuing vocational training at a trade school or college level are considered adults entitled to all services available to anyone determined eligible for VR services, including low vision services.

g. Employment: In terms of the purchase of equipment, what is expected of the employer; for initial covering of all or part of the cost, and for later maintenance?

The responsibility for purchase of assistive technology on the job largely depends on the job. Some employers are very supportive of visually impaired employees and have no problems paying for assistive technology or other accommodations as needed. Other employers may find such accommodations a disincentive to hiring a blind job applicant. The bottom line for NCBVI is to do whatever is necessary to help blind job seekers find employment. If that means providing the equipment needed to establish a client on a job, it will be done.

Employers understand that they will be responsible for updates and maintenance of assistive technology and software used by a blind worker on the job. It is also understood that employers can contact NCBVI for technical assistance in the event of major changes in technology compromising the worker's ability to function. Employers have generally assumed the responsibility for the cost of new equipment or services needed to maintain the worker on the job. These understandings are communicated to the employer before the case is closed.

h. How is present funding levels for equipment in VR and IL programs?)

Considering only the federal allocation of funds to NCBVI and the state match for those funds, approximately 90% of the total budget is dedicated to the provision of VR services and 10% for IL services. At this point, funding for services, including low vision services, for clients in the VR track is not a problem. If NCBVI ever has to turn away applicants for services for lack of funds, an order of selection must be established identifying those to be served first. NCBVI is nowhere near that point.

While funding for services to clients in the IL track is much less, NCBVI does not have to establish an order of selection in the event clients are denied services because of lack of funding. So far, NCBVI has not had to deny services to IL clients even though funds allocated through Title VII Part B and Chapter 2 of the Rehabilitation Act for IL programs have often been exhausted before the end of the fiscal year. The reason for this is the availability of program income in the form of Social Security reimbursement. Last year, NCBVI received approximately \$1.25 million in Social Security reimbursement for rehabilitation services provided to closed clients who became employed and got off Social Security. These funds may be used in support of clients in either the VR or IL track. This gives NCBVI considerable latitude in consideration of services to be provided to individual clients.

4. Low Vision Training for Consumers:

a. What kind of low vision training are NCBVI staff expected to provide to our consumers; VR and/or IL, respectively?

NCBVI counselors and technology specialists provide training in low vision aids and devices to VR clients if it will maximize the client's potential for eventual employment. Training may include the use of equipment such as closed-circuit TVs and large print computer screen access technology. If training is likely to involve a considerable investment of time on the part of the trainer, the technology specialist rather than the counselor is more likely to work with the client. In some cases, a third-party vendor may be contracted to provide training.

Training in low vision aids and devices provided to IL clients is also available, but restricted to only a few visits by a Counselor or technology specialist. If, however, it is determined that low vision aids and devices will promote the client's ability to live more independently, and, if a third-party contractor can conduct the training, low vision services can be provided as indicated.

Please note that the restriction on the amount of time NCBVI staff members can commit to serving IL clients has nothing to do with available funding. NCBVI has more than enough financial resources to meet the need. Rather, the constraint on time is imposed by the breakdown of the overall budget. Since 10% of the budget is dedicated to the provision of services to clients in the IL track, the overall commitment of staff time committed to IL services should also not exceed 10%. At present, the commitment of staff time to VR and IL services is where it needs to be, but it would not take much to tip the balance.

b. In training, or counseling with a consumer wanting low vision equipment and training, how does NCBVI approach the knowledge that sometimes non-visual methods are more efficient than low vision tactics?

Early in the process of determining the need for services, clients are asked to identify the areas where they experience the most difficulty because of their visual impairment. In the initial exploration of options for resolving these difficulties, both low vision and non-visual techniques are explored. The efficacy of different techniques are discussed in terms of how well different strategies work in different situations. Clients can sometimes decide which strategies work best for them after a brief demonstration. Choosing a method for identifying different denominations of bills in a wallet is a case in point. Sometimes a period of training is necessary before a client can make an informed choice as to how they will handle specific situations. Navigating their way through a restaurant could be an example of this.

5. Training of Staff:

a. What is the nature of the low vision training for new staff?

Once new counselors and technology specialists complete training in the Center, they shadow other counselors as new referrals are contracted and available services are explained. In this way, new counselors and technology specialists learn how more experienced staff members review overall services, including low vision aids and devices. They see how new referrals may be provided items from Discretionary Supply such as handwriting guides, bold-line writing guides, locator dots, and so on. They see how household appliances are marked with bright locator dots for easier visual or tactual setting. They see how other staff members introduce low vision solutions for taking notes, making lists, maintaining a schedule using a large print calendar, accessing addresses, labeling items, and so on. They learn to demonstrate various magnifiers contained in demonstration kits and equipment provided by distributors of products for the blind.

During the probationary period following Center training, new counselors and technology specialists learn about and are expected to become familiar with community resources, including eye care professionals, low vision specialists, and vendors of products for the blind in the service area covered by the office they work in.

b. What is the nature of ongoing training for existing staff look like? (Be it a refresher and or learning about new techniques and or equipment?)

Ongoing training in such areas as diseases of the eye and the implications for rehabilitation posed by specific types of vision loss and demonstrations of new technologies are conducted periodically at the office, district, and state levels. The workshop on low vision services conducted by Elaine Rivera in December 2011 is an example of this.

6. Consistency Commission Wide:

a. What is in place to assure the consistency in the provision of low vision services throughout the Commission? (Example: Extent and quality of evaluations, purchase of equipment, training of consumers consistent from district to district, from staff person to staff person? How do you monitor this?)

Again, NCBVI does not employ low vision specialists or conduct low vision evaluations.

Supervisors of field services meet on a monthly basis to discuss relevant issues and concerns impacting services to VR and IL clients. Consistency in the provision of services statewide is a frequently discussed topic. To the extent possible, every effort is made to make sure services available to clients in Lincoln or Omaha are also available to clients in other parts of the state. Supervisors communicate the essential details of what is discussed at the supervisors meetings to staff members in their respective district. Whenever possible, the Deputy Directors attend these meetings at the office or district level to answer questions or concerns and to make sure that the same information is being communicated statewide.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Nebraska Board of Optometry

FROM: Pearl Van Zandt, Ph.D. Executive Director

SUBJECT: Low Vision Services

DATE: September 26, 2002

Since receiving your memorandum concerning low vision services, we have been obtaining feedback from our rehabilitation staff in six offices statewide to determine the exact nature of our involvement with low vision. The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) employs rehabilitation professionals who travel the state to meet with individuals with impaired vision.

NCBVI staff perform two primary functions: to help people understand blindness and to teach them non-visual ways to perform activities of daily living without the use of sight. We do frequently assist with funding for Low Vision Evaluations, including transportation to eye care specialists for those evaluations. However, this strategy does not meet all the needs. Many of the older blind persons with whom we work are not able to travel even if transportation is provided. Another obstacle is that even with funding for a driver, the individual is often unable to find someone to drive for them. There still are not low vision specialists in every town or even county.

We frequently encounter individuals who already have various devices. Some devices had been purchased through a catalog or store. In other cases the individuals have had low vision evaluations by a specialist. It is not uncommon to find that the devices are no longer effective for the individual. Either the person has lost additional vision or the device does not work in the home setting for various reasons. When we work with persons and low vision devices, it is only within the context of our expertise. We do not prescribe nor treat. We may encourage the person to try a device with their back to the window, for example, or to use contrast as an aid.

Most of the time, we teach blind individuals how to do the task non-visually. When we demonstrate aids or devices, we do not measure vision or in any way diagnose. The information comes from the person and any determination of whether a device might be useful is entirely subjective on their part. This part is no different than the person purchasing a magnifying aid directly from the local discount, department, or drugstore.

Most of our rehabilitation staff has basic knowledge of the causes of blindness; however we all are clear that we are not experts. We encourage anyone with questions about diseases of the eye to make an appointment with an eye care specialist. If eye care specialists have questions about the services provided by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, we will be pleased to provide presentations at organizational meetings or clinic staff meetings, or individually to discuss our work with you.

End of 2002 Memorandum

NCBVI Collaterals
(Public Information Materials)

Business:

“Working with the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been a very rewarding experience for me. Six months ago, I hired a new employee that came highly recommended by the Commission. Not only did my department receive an outstanding employee, but the Commission offered all of our employees a tour (they conducted about 5 tours) of the Commission and the opportunity to learn what would be helpful for us to know when working with a blind person - how to appropriately assist the employee in the workplace, and an explanation of the training she would have received through the Commission in order to live an independent life. This tour included a demonstration of the technology the new employee would be using to do the job in our office. I won't hesitate to contact the Commission the next time I'm searching for an employee!”

— COLLEEN HULS, UNL

The support provided by NCBVI includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Providing qualified individuals who want to work.
- Providing technology/equipment to enable your employee to be efficient and productive.
- Training support to promote efficiency and integration into your workplace.
- Paid internships and on-the-job training.
- A ready resource to answer questions about blindness, technical support and follow-up.

Clients:

“A young woman pauses at a busy intersection, listening intently. She is not alarmed by the traffic speeding in front of her, and politely declines help from a passerby. When she is sure the light has changed, she proceeds to the other side of the street and continues on her way. I can hardly believe that the confident young woman is me.”

— KAYDE RIEKEN

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI), the state vocational rehabilitation agency for the blind, is committed to helping blind and visually impaired Nebraskans achieve fuller and more rewarding lives through services promoting a positive understanding of blindness and the potential abilities of blind people. Our approach comes from understanding and dedication.

“What I felt growing in me more than anything was something I had not felt in almost two years—the confidence to know that there is nothing that I cannot do. I may have to do it a little differently than others, but I can do it.”

— CHAD WEBER

The services provided by NCBVI includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Training in non-visual (or “low vision”) skills that allow full participation in life.
- Assistance in securing or maintaining employment.
- Fulfilling employment needs in Nebraska.
- Career counseling and guidance resulting in employment.
- Job-related equipment, tools, and supplies.
- Educational assistance such as tuition, books, equipment and readers.
- Peer support and counseling.
- Consultation services for agencies and community organizations which come into contact with blind persons.

Business Enterprises/Blind Vendor Program

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE) grew out of federal legislation, known as the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and gives priority to licensed blind vendors in federal cafeterias, lunchrooms and break areas for vending machines. In Nebraska, this priority was expanded to state owned buildings or properties and is giving blind entrepreneurs the opportunity to run their successful business, becoming contributing members of society. NBE entrepreneurs rely on hard work, daily service and meticulous attention to customer needs to capture the competitive edge lost to private vendors with their high-volume operations. The NBE provides the training for qualified blind persons to become licensed vending facility managers. In addition to ongoing support services, the NBE establishes new vending facilities and monitors the business practices at current facilities to insure that all managers are providing the best service possible at the most competitive prices. The NBE is administered by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the NBE is to assist blind persons in securing meaningful employment. This can only be achieved when the blind entrepreneur consistently provides the best service available.

In 1996, NBE setup its first vending route at an interstate rest area. Currently there are 19 rest areas being operated by blind entrepreneurs. The blind vending facility manager’s income and reputation are earned daily through hard work, attention to detail and personalized service to the customer. Vending facility managers take great pride in keeping the facility area spotless and the machines clean and well stocked. All NBE trainees must demonstrate their abilities as competent business managers before becoming licensed vendors. NBE entrepreneurs receive all proceeds from the facility operation, maintain these funds and are accountable for paying taxes, rent, a set-aside fee

and other business expenses. The set-aside fee is a percentage assessed against the net proceeds to pay for maintenance, replacement of equipment and management services.

GOALS

- Provide employment opportunities to qualified blind persons desiring to become managers in the food service industry
- Provide public education by demonstrating the abilities of blind persons
- Provide blind persons experience in business management
- Provide the best possible customer service for lunch break time needs
- Provide the best possible service to travelers across Nebraska through vending facilities at interstate rest areas