

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting
Saturday, February 03, 2018
4600 Valley Rd., Room 4A
Lincoln, NE
and
505 A Broadway, Suite 700
Scottsbluff, NE

Minutes

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

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

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

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director, Lincoln; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor, Lincoln; Shane Buresh, Transition Coordinator, Lincoln; Stephanie Baldwin, Transition Counselor, Lincoln; Jeremy Richey, OC Counselor, Lincoln; Nancy Burdine, Program Manager Technology, Lincoln.

Public Present: Leslie Wagner, Transition Specialist from NCECBVI; Dr. Tanya Armstrong, Outreach Director from NCECBVI; Josh Wichman, Cheryl Wichman, Seth Kadler, Barb Kadler, Michael Kadler, Barbara Epworth, Barbara Loos, Brad Loos, Crystal Platt, Julie Johnson, Greg Johnson, Jim Jirak, Kenda Slavin, Kathy Fox, Chris Brennfoeder, Dale Oviat, Connie Stilwell.

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

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

Approval of the November 4th public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the November 4, 2017 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Partnership with the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired.

Shane Buresh, NCBVI Transition Coordinator, gave a presentation regarding the relationship between NCBVI and NCECBVI. Shane stated that in the field of blindness in Nebraska he would say that NCBVI and NCECBVI are the two longest term organizations that specialize in blindness. There is a long history of service to children who are blind or visually impaired. The passage of WIOA in 2014 has impacted our services. One exciting impact is that WIOA has asked agencies to work better together with local education agencies (LEAs). So often, what happens, there is education programming that goes on to try to prepare for your future and then somewhere in your teenage years the adult agency (NCBVI) comes along. The agencies were acting like two ships passing in the night. WIOA wants agencies to work closer together. While NCBVI has made efforts to do this over the years it is great to have that focus. One of the things that happened is that NCBVI created a Transition Specialist position and at about the same time NCECBVI created a Transition Specialist position. Shane stated that there is no doubt that NCBVI and NCECBVI both want to serve blind youth in Nebraska the best way they know how.

NCBVI continues to collaborate with NCECBVI. This year NCBVI was invited to and presented at a parent workshop in September designed to help students and their parents understand what they need to have in place to succeed in college. NCBVI also participated as a stakeholder in their annual meeting and NCBVI staff met with their administrative team to develop joint programming opportunities and establish collaborative agreements.

Shane introduced Leslie Wagner as the Transition Specialist from NCECBVI and Dr. Tanya Armstrong as the Outreach Director from NCECBVI. Leslie and Tanya will talk about the services they provide at NCECBVI.

Dr. Tanya Armstrong - Founded in 1875, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI) serves children from infancy to age 21. NCECBVI's program offers the expertise and specialized skills of the center's staff to blind, visually impaired, and multi-handicapped students in residential, day, and outreach settings. Services are provided to local school districts, students, families, teachers, and other support staff upon request. NCECBVI has a Resource Center that offers materials for students statewide.

Leslie Wagner – In her position, she works with parents, students and teachers to help them to prepare students for where they are going to live, work and learn. There are a lot of things that NCECBVI does to help students with this. They work a lot with the

teachers of students with visual impairments across the state and they are working really hard to bring their knowledge and expertise to the table for transition. They work with areas in career education, independent living skills and self-determination. NCECBI has work based learning as part of their school day which means that a lot of their students go out on community based job sites. As a part of her position, Shane's position, and the legislative changes with WIOA, there has been the opportunity to provide their students with some summer work experiences. Leslie stated that she really appreciated the partnership with everyone from NCBVI that she has gotten to know. Leslie added that the partnership will only grow from here and they will be talking about how they can expand their partnership.

Summer Work Readiness Training Project with NCECBI

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired hereafter referred to as (NCBVI) has a long history of programmatically support in assisting teen-aged students with working during the summer like their sighted counterparts. Generally these work experiences have come during the work based learning experience we offer entitled Work And Gain Experience in the Summer (WAGES). WAGES affords students/consumers five or six weeks of 80 percent to fulltime employment and of course, the experience of being away from home and learning the beginning skills of eventually moving into adult living settings. This program has expanded in recent time and has begun to take a wider and more diverse population based on disability than before, but attendees must still be able to complete the work load and have a reasonably high degree of independence skills in terms of daily tasks. Unfortunately, the duration or the sure riggers of such a program are sometimes a bit beyond the reach or scope of capability of some clients, who can and want to work but could not be at their most successful in a program setting such as WAGES. Many of these students are only able to work 10 hours or less a week and for medical or other reasons may need to stay in their home communities. A situation which may be the highest they can achieve or certainly a situation which allows them to excel. Many of these folks will need support for employment throughout their life time and therefore, utilizing job readiness trainers and shortened work schedules, while perhaps seeming somehow as settling for less in our minds is truly in keeping with high expectations for individuals who need such accommodation. We realized that a tweak to our successful model was necessary for this small but important subset of folks we serve.

Likewise, The Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, hereafter referred to as (NCECBVI), which is a statewide academic program for birth to 21 aged students who have a visual disability as one of their conditions, recently began a transition program to try and increase community participation for their consumers. It became apparent to them and us, that much learning and progress is eroded over the summer break and to keep the momentum and to increase worked based learning for our programs, we should jointly work together on a summer work based learning experience project.

Thus, in the spring of 2017 NCECBVI and NCBVI began talking about how we could partner to offer summer employment opportunities to several students whom we jointly served and identified as interested and capable but also possessing challenges that meant limited home based work would be best. While these students were having much success working during their school day in Nebraska City where NCECBVI is located, it would be a tremendous asset for their futures to make home based employment connections. Plus, what teen-ager doesn't want to earn some spending money and the pride that comes along with it.

In April, Stephanie Baldwin and Shane Buresh, along with Leslie Wagner, Transition Specialist and Audrey Graves, Principal from NCECBVI, met and identified three individuals, one young woman (Emily) and two young men (Josh and Seth), who ranged in age from 16 to 21 and whom they felt fit the enthusiasm for a desire to engage in a short duration summer employment experience in their home towns with job readiness trainers who could help them be as successful and independent as possible. Emily and Seth were from the same town, David City Nebraska and Josh happened to be from Nebraska City where NCECBVI is based. Collectively these students were not only blind or severely low-vision in functioning; they also had secondary disabilities such as, schizophrenia, CP, limited motor function, autism spectrum disorder, developmental disabilities, etc.

They approached the students and their families and once they were on board with the project, the four of them began a joint employer search in both of the towns, which also enhanced their collaborative rapport. Their team made two trips to each community and after approaching multiple employers, they decided to work with the St. Joseph Villa skilled nursing facility and the Roman L. and Victoria E. Hruska Memorial Library for the two David City based students and Valentinos Pizza and the Keeping Room Café in Nebraska City for the other.

Emily and Seth, the two David City students worked at both job sights. They each had their own job readiness trainer which was funded by NCBVI. It so happened that each of these folks were public school special education teachers; one from David City who worked with Emily and one from Wahoo who worked with Seth. It should be noted that while these two students worked the same jobs at the same employers, they came during separate days and shifts so as to make their own unique growth and experience. At the nursing facility they worked in the laundry department and their job duties included folding of napkins, bedding and towels. The job readiness trainer for Emily said that her student exceeded expectations and that the staff could hardly keep up with her student. At the second job site, the Library, the students read braille to children during the summer reading program with twin vision books and helped with set-up and clean-up after the activities. Seth took an additional step in independence and he practiced using local public transportation. He took the initiative to call and make the appointments and independently traveled between the job sites. His job readiness trainer said of him, "He knew what to do when he got to work and was always ready to work."

As was mentioned, Josh, the student from Nebraska City, worked at two eating establishments. He took public transportation from his home to the job sites and back independently and he spent his work hours, washing dishes, folding pizza boxes, folding napkins and pitching in where needed. He worked with a job readiness trainer who is a para-educator at his school and has taken much pride in his accomplishments.

Josh and Seth were on a panel and they answered questions about their experiences while working at the job sites. Emily spoke about her experiences via a recorded video. The mothers of Josh and Seth also spoke about their experience and what they learned along with their sons during this summer based work opportunity.

Pride was actually echoed by all three of the students who worked. Even though they only worked an average of six hours per week and an average of 42 hours over the entire summer, the experience was life changing for them.

It is hoped that these kinds of summer based work opportunities for students with additional disabilities will not only continue, but expand going forward. It is further hoped that the collaborative process demonstrated can be duplicated by other students and local school districts to give even more individuals opportunities. This initial project demonstrated that a local school district and NCBVI can work jointly to leverage Pre-ETS dollars to provide skill gains for students, by utilizing their collective experience and set of resources to enhance the experience and success for the students they both serve to a higher level than if they programmed alone. Public school teachers and para's were leveraged to provide instruction which allowed them to get to know their students better, NCBVI utilized not only funds, but human resources to make sure employer contacts and NCECBVI participated throughout all aspects, which allowed them to learn more about the students they serve and assisted in the prevention of regression of skills over the summer and a more seamless transition back to work opportunities during the school year. Most importantly is that the students themselves demonstrated gains in, Career Education, Self Determination, Independent Living Skills, Orientation & Mobility skills, and Social Interaction enhancement and the sense of pride that comes along with contribution and the pay that goes with a job well done.

NCBVI Transition Programs

Throughout our history, NCBVI has long recognized the need for transition services as early as possible in a young person's life. Meaningful work experiences, exposure to successful adult role models and training in independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up.

Increased similar recognition of the need for specific services to youth with disabilities has now been established at the federal level, beginning in 2014 with the passage of WIOA. WIOA places greater emphasis on Pre-Employment Transition Services, (Pre-ETS), promoting a smoother transition from school to work. Since its passage NCBVI has embraced the challenge of the more intense focus to assist blind and visually impaired students aged 14-21 through job exploration, work readiness skills, college

and post-secondary exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and self-advocacy skill development. Over this past year NCBVI executed a number of programs and initiatives which are designed to increase and sustain greater independence and build confidence in the youth we serve. Detailed below then are summations of much of our work in the area of Transition Services for NCBVI this year.

Winnerfest

This year the Spring Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI, and the International School of Protocol, a Baltimore based training organization, who seeks to better the lives of everyone through the empowerment of the possession of information and greater social and emotional skills. It was entitled: "Blind & Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Harnessing the Power of Emotional Intelligence for Self-advocacy and College Success". Nineteen youth were empowered to reach for higher achievement in their future endeavors in both the worlds of work and college. While this program covered standard fare such as how to work a room and public speaking, this curriculum had the students dig deeper within themselves and encouraged them to try to develop and utilize their own personal emotional intelligence. Students worked on everything from verbal and non-verbal communication, to concepts such as time management, relationship building and how to properly utilize technology. A particular highlight was the college recruiter fair reception. The students visited booths with college recruiters and navigated a reception style situation learning how to travel the room with food, drink and a long white cane. The Winnerfest concluded with a dining experience which simulated either a more formal business or social situation dinner.

The fall Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI and We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind. For this workshop however, We Fit Wellness, designed a curriculum that focused on all of the five WIOA Pre-ETS requirements. It was simply entitled: "Exploring Employment". During this program 15 youth were empowered to leverage their own unique talents and abilities to become better leaders and team players and be able to more effectively anticipate the future. The students were exposed to a wide range of activities some unique to blindness and others which were universal in nature. These included: networking with peers, how to dress to impress, the art of social dancing, how to hunt for jobs with technology designed for the blind, the ins and outs of entrepreneurship and how you could be your own boss, self-advocacy on the job role plays, explored what the job scape of the future for the blind might look like, conducted a volunteer work experience at a local nursing home facility, engaged in challenging games to build leadership and team building skills, participated in mock interviews which were recorded for future work back in the field with their counselors and watched a movie entitled "Do You Dream in Color?".

College Workshop

This year we held the College Workshop which was jointly sponsored with the Nebraska Association of Blind Students (NABS). Seventeen (17) Pre-ETS students about to make the transition to college and adult students already in school attended this event. Our keynote speaker was Henry (Hoby) Wedler PH D., a blind chemist who owns his

own consulting company. He spoke to everyone about the importance of being assertive, following their dreams, taking risks and not excepting limits that others place upon them. He empowered everyone with discussions about how they can do Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) or other classes that are traditionally not thought to be accessible to blind persons. He even led each student through several hands on science demonstrations to underscore the point.

Other highlights from this seminar included, presentations by NCBVI technology staff , a memory techniques and study skills seminar by Dale Carnegie, presentations by WINAHEAD and Education Qwest, 1 touch self-defense demonstrations which come from a specific set of techniques for the blind, discussions by blind college students and parents, blind persons talking about how to get involved in extracurricular activities, philosophical discussions on how to handle real-life situations as a blind student and a dorm style cooking skills activity.

WAGES 2017

This past summer, WAGES provided work, blindness skill enhancement and life experiences for 16 blind and visually impaired students ages 15 to 21.

For the second year in a row, WAGES was kicked off with an opening weekend seminar presented by the International School of Protocol, entitled: "Blind and Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Strategies for Managing Relationships on and off the Job for Personal and Professional Success". This curriculum focused on workplace skills and how to be socially savvy in the work environment. The students conducted many hands on activities and capped off the program with a graduation ceremony where they presented awards to one another in a banquet type setting.

Once the program began in earnest, the students worked fulltime jobs ranging between 30 and 40 hours per week. Here is a sampling to illustrate the wide variety of employers around Lincoln who step up each summer to assist our students with their growth and expanding capabilities: St. Elizabeth's Heart Hospital; Capitol Humane Society; Antonio's Tastes of Lincoln; State Capitol Tours; Southeast High School custodial department; Latino American Commission; Aging Partners; Selleck Dining Services; Lancaster County Records Department and Information Management; Clyde Malone Community Center; Public Works and Utilities; Holiday Inn Lincoln Southwest; Downtown YMCA; Canine Design; and Lincoln Children's Zoo.

In addition, WAGES again included an out of state trip to a blindness consumer convention. This afforded the students the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills into practice. It was by all accounts a very successful endeavor. Whether it was flying and leaving Nebraska for the first time or navigating a hotel independently with a long white cane, everyone grew through one experience or another. In fact, the growth in the students was tremendous and they emerged as a group who sees their blindness as a part of them not a barrier to who they will become.

Project Independence

Each summer NCBVI hosts a four day blindness skill immersion and recreational opportunities based summer camp entitled “Project Independence”. This summer ten youth between 8 and 13 attended. The theme was “I Put the PI in Pioneer: Exploring My Future Frontier”. This theme was selected to help celebrate Nebraska’s 150th birthday and to highlight the parallel between the journey that life will take them on and how they need to be ready and the preparation for the journey our earliest settlers had to take to be successful. Attendees participated in a competition for completing typical daily tasks, as well as, audio archery and fishing, building their own 1867 era toys, planting plants they could take home, took a hayrack ride went on a cookout, ran their own birthday party planning service and gave Nebraska a birthday party, took a field trip into Lincoln to learn about Nebraska’s history, and much more.

District Based Programs

NCBVI also offers many individualized and group transition services on an on-going basis at the local or district level through a variety of field based and group teaching opportunities. The Lincoln District brings in students monthly on a Saturday who are K-12 for a group they call (STARS), which stands for Social, Techniques, Advocacy, and Recreation for Students. Likewise, Omaha District holds three groups monthly they are entitled Teen Adventures in Blindness Skills (TABS), and Junior TABS for elementary aged students and a brand new biweekly group Transition Skills Group (TSG). TSG focuses mainly on job exploration, work readiness and self-advocacy skills. Meanwhile, the TABS group focuses on blindness skill acquisition. Jr. TABS then is for teaching blindness skills to elementary aged students.

On a quarterly basis parents also attend a parallel session to discuss issues and build a peer network that they can leverage for advice on iep rites, best practices for their students, etc. Recently, this parent group has expanded statewide through the use of the telephone to offer support and connections to all of the parents of NCBVI’s clients.

Staff Development in Transition Service Delivery

NCBVI formed an internal transition committee to bring consistency and collaboration to our transition efforts state-wide. Thus far this committee has concentrated on how to improve relations with other partners and teachers, how to bring better consistency to our service delivery statewide and how to create resources for our current and future staff to help raise the capacity of all staff in the area of transition. The committee consists of staff from all three districts who perform Pre-ETS duties, a supervisor and the transition specialist.

Outreach and Collaboration

During this past year NCBVI has made efforts to intensify our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired and other education providers. We continue to make direct visits introducing ourselves and reminding education personnel that we are the lead agency for youth in Nebraska who are experiencing blindness and visual impairment. Vocational Rehabilitation staff also continues to make visits to local school districts to try and discover youth we may not have yet known about.

NCBVI transition staff also helped plan and present at the Eastern Nebraska Transition Conference and we continue to present at courses of special education teacher preparation at UNL which are conducted by the director of the teachers of the visually impaired endorsement program. As a result, the Transition Specialist was invited to sit on a new advisory committee at UNL. This committee is formed as part of a grant given to both the teachers of deaf and blind preparation programs by the OSEP office entitled the Mid-Plains Professional Upgrade Partnership – Sensory Disabilities. This Advisory Board will meet annually to review progress, evaluate program data, and provide suggestions for training and recruiting teachers.

Another additional opportunity that NCBVI took this year to raise our visibility within the field of transition in the state was to participate in a Capacity Building forum in Kansas City. This forum was Nation Wide in scope and was designed to bring the core partners in transition together at one table to create a plan for how to move transition forward within Nebraska. This was a significant development for NCBVI because, while this forum has existed for more than 10 years now, NCBVI had never been invited. Nebraska VR was previously thought to be the only partner of record needed to include adult rehabilitation. Raising our visibility has been and continues to be one of the priorities in the upcoming months and years and each step forward is not small. It is our belief that these relationships and our programs have led to much growth in professional collaboration.

Break

A break was taken at 10:30 a.m. and the meeting resumed at 10:45 a.m.

Quarterly Business

Report from the Executive Director

Director Serván shared a quote from Franklin D. Roosevelt that relates to today's Focus Topic. "We don't always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."

I. Client Statistics October 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017.

A. For Older Blind/Independent Living services

Since the beginning of the fiscal year, there were 60 applicants for services. Of these, 58 applicants were accepted for services; 2 applicants were not accepted for services, 1 for "other reason" and 1 "withdrawn." There were 0 applicants remaining at the end of the period.

There were 181 active clients on hand at the beginning of the fiscal year. Fifty-eight clients were added to active status since the beginning of the fiscal year, making for a total of 239 clients altogether in active status during the fiscal year. Of these, 94 clients were closed successful with 6 clients referred to VR services, 10 clients were closed

unsuccessful do to: 5 “deceased” and 5 “other reasons.” One hundred thirty-five clients remain in active status at the end of the period.

B. Independent Living under 55 October 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017

At the beginning of the fiscal year, there were 5 applicants for services. Of these, 4 applicants were accepted for services and 1 remained in applicant status at the end of the period. There were 4 active clients on hand at the beginning of the fiscal year; 4 applicants were added to active status during the fiscal year, making for a total of 8 clients in active status altogether during the fiscal year. Of these, 0 clients were closed and 8 clients remained in active status at the end of the period. Total number of IL referrals, applicants and clients in all statuses at the end of the period was 9.

C. Vocational Rehabilitation October 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017

Three hundred eighty-nine clients were in active status at the beginning of the year. Thirty clients have been accepted for services since the beginning of the fiscal year, making for a total of 419 clients in active status during the fiscal year. Of these, 4 clients were closed as successful and 28 clients were closed as unsuccessful after an IPE was developed for the following reasons: 10 no longer interested in services, 1 does not require VR services, 1 for health/medical reasons, 1 was institutionalized (Not Jail or Prison), 7 were unable to be located, 2 deaths, 3 transferred to another agency, and 3 for all other reasons. Two clients were closed as unsuccessful before an IPE was developed for the following reason: 1 was no longer interested in receiving services and 1 was unable to be located. Three hundred eighty-five clients remain in active status.

Total number of VR clients served in Active Statuses was 419. Total number of VR referrals, applicants and clients in all statuses at the end of the period was 437.

In November, we had the WIOA Partners Council meeting to continue our progress on the implementation of WIOA requirements. I was elected Vice Chair. However, the Chair resigned a week after he was elected, and I am now the Chair for 2018. At the NCSAB Fall conference, I was elected as a member of the Executive Committee. I am also the Chair for the Transition Committee. In addition, I was asked to help with national efforts on increasing OIB funds and also working with state agencies that had Center training.

Back in December, the WIOA Core Partners met to talk about the bids for the Common Intake system, but all the proposals were denied. At this point the Partners are working on a more basic Intake System to be developed.

I had a conversation with the President of the Omaha Association for the Blind to explore ideas on how to partner to help the OIB population.

On January 12, Bill Brown, Carol Jenkins, Matt Hackett, and Nancy Burdine attended a demonstration on accessibility for FusioN. The good news is that they brought a JAWS

user, a blind person, to do the demonstration on the HR area. There were also representatives from the OCIO, Byron Diamond, Michael Rasmussen, among others at this meeting. It shows that they are very serious about our concern. However, the bad news is that when our staff asks about the financial part of FusioN, the JAWS user said that he was never involved on such area. Our staff expressed concern that this is the area where we have the problem. They recognized that it might comply with the accessibility guidelines but the system is still not useable.

On January 13, Carol Jenkins and I went to talk to the NFBN Board of Directors as they wanted clarification about our budget. We are getting some calls from consumers asking how they can help by contacting Nebraska senators and we are providing them the information they need. During the weeks of January 22 and January 29, I met with three senators from the Appropriations Committee. The NCBVI Budget Hearing is scheduled for February 7 at 1:30 p.m.

During the week of January 15, we sent our first progress report to RSA on our Plan of Action for Pre-ETS.

We have a verbal agreement to start a Mentoring Program with the Jernigan Institute which should start in April. This will help to count transportation, room and board for our activities. We also signed a MOU with NCECBVI to share information so we both can serve blind students better.

II: Human Resources:

Stephanie Olson was hired to fill the Vocational Rehabilitation Technician position in Norfolk and she began her duties with the agency on November 27, 2017 and was able to work alongside Connie Carlow for three weeks. Josie Rodriguez retired on November 16, 2017; Connie Carlow retired on December 15, 2017; Cheryl Poff retired on December 22, 2017; Bob Deaton announced his retirement, effective January 31, 2018; and Bill Brown announced his retirement, effective August 7, 2018. Due to the complexity and numerous duties/facets of Bill's position, the agency received permission from State Personnel to advertise for Bill Brown's replacement immediately, so that the new person can work alongside Bill for about five months, thus making for a smooth transition into this critical position. Bob Deaton's position will not be refilled and the savings the agency will have from not filling the position will be used to fund the new Business Manager III position. We received 50 applications and decided to withdraw the job posting; four candidates were selected for interviews. The interviews took place on January 25 and we offered the position to Kathy Carroll and she accepted the position. Finally, the position for Center Supervisors was posted on January 18 and closed on January 31. We received around 15 applications and we will be interviewing four individuals who are all out of state.

III. Measures taking to Balance our Budget:

We engaged all NCBVI staff to give ideas for balancing our budget so we can continue to provide quality services with the limited budget for this year, due to the structural deficit and the lack of extra federal reallocation. Some of the ideas are as follows:

Travel: NCSAB Conference - from four or five staff attending to one staff attending. Attending National consumer conventions – Pre-ETS are only going to national convention if they are a part of the NFB Career Mentoring Program. No other Pre-ETS are going. Staff can attend National consumer conventions on work time, but no other support will be offered. This includes the executive director. However, the executive director will ask for full support to attend the ACB National Convention.

We are delaying the implementation of the AWARE Financial Module to limit duplicate costs because of the new State Accounting system. We are cutting back on temporary employment services, re-evaluating our overall office space and our criteria for providing demonstration equipment to offices. We are also taking a critical look at all vacancies and staff assignments.

We are not having a State Staff Meeting this year. We are not sending staff to conferences out of the state such as BLAST and Sagebrush. We are not filling the position for Josie Rodriguez, Bob Deaton, and Cheryl Poff for now. We had saved some money from my position for few months when I was interim director and still covering my duties as deputy director. We are also saving from Carol's position as she is also covering the Center supervisor duties for now. We are not having the annual retreat for vendors. We are being conservative on providing client supply items. We are buying less expensive items. We are not updating agency furniture, computers, and other items as often as we use to do it. We disconnected several landlines as staff have agency cell phones. We are not contracting with out-of-state trainers, I.E. Motivational Interviewing among others. We are reducing significantly purchases of adaptive equipment for older blind clients. We are cutting the membership for this year from some entities such as Chamber of Commerce and we are considering cutting our membership from NCSAB.

IV. Other Administrative Items:

Bob Deaton finished writing the history of the agency: "Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind in Nebraska: A History". We submitted a draft of the modification and updated text in the Combined State Plan relevant to NCBVI for the WIOA Partners. This is to update some information after the federal regulations were in place. We will contract with Gemini Research to conduct an Assessment for employment/transition programs. This is mandated by the Federal Government.

The 2017 NCBVI Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral. Kathy and Bob are working to get NCBVI Rules and Regulations draft amendments ready to be sent to the Governor's Office and then set for a Public Hearing.

We got some pre-approvals for NBE Equipment to put in Corrections. We are working on the financial piece of AWARE, but want to double check what will be the best timing so we don't have to pay extra. We also submitted our year end federal

reports. We are working with the Auditor's office on the Single Audit of the Vocational Rehabilitation Grant, providing them the information they need.

V. Field Services:

Counselors continue to meet with ESUs and public schools to create and continue building partnerships with them. Counselors also continue to be involved with Project Search to have clients with multiple disabilities get work experience and eventually a permanent job. Our supervisors continue to attend local WIOA Board meetings, being involved and educating partners about blindness and our services. Districts also hold job training sessions for their clients so they can be ready when the time comes to look for a job.

Since Bob Deaton retired, Erin Brandyberry is becoming our point person to help us with severe disabilities and Section 511. Several staff members have begun attending some meetings with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Developmental Disabilities (DD) to better serve this population.

Our agency was invited to do a presentation at the 2018 Department of Education Transition Conference. Several of our staff are participating on different networking and outreach events such as Leadership entities in their communities, annual AgraAbility (Easter Seals) meeting, the Fall Foliage at NCECBVI, and others.

Counselors work on different areas with students helping them better understand the services available to them and their responsibilities as well as involving parents in the process. Tim Jefferson continues to hold quarterly meetings with parents.

Nancy Burdine completed Center Training on December 19. She is being acclimated to her position and already helping us in the area of technology. She will be doing some work that the CIO did for us, but OCIO is in the process of determining what role/access she will have. We already got the management tool software and Nancy should be able to use it once OCIO makes its determination. We also provided Nancy Burdine with software to remotely access computers on our network. This helps in trouble shooting issues and installing software. This is working as expected. She also received a list of what access groups exist for NCBVI and who are in them. She will also work with OCIO to get access to change group access ourselves rather than have to go through them.

During the first weekend of November, we had 15 Pre-ETS youth at the fall Winnerfest. The program was a collaborative effort between NCBVI and We Fit Wellness, which designed a curriculum that focused on work readiness skills and self-advocacy skills enhancement, and incorporated all of the five WIOA Pre-ETS requirements.

VI. Nebraska Center for the Blind

We have eight students at the Center. There were 3 Three Day Stays and 2 staff trainees completed training. Activities were temporarily cancelled at this time due to the budget. However, we are looking at free activities and volunteering possibilities as well as possibly some activity support from the Friends of the Commission. Once the

agency receives additional Social Security Reimbursement funds activities will be something we will do again, but on a much smaller scale. We have two clients that need one on one teaching/training currently due to severe multiple disabilities.

The Center will also have two new staff trainees in the near future because of the advanced hiring for a new Business Manager III and the rehiring for a Center Supervisor.

VII. Nebraska Business Enterprise

The Camp Ashland Dining Facility contract ended December 22, 2017. NBE staff assisted in closing out accounts for the contractor, completing inventory of military equipment and goods purchased and closing out the facility.

We are still negotiating with the Department of Corrections to receive machines labeled as supporting "Inmate Welfare". A meeting was held with the Nebraska Attorney General's office on January 29 to assist with interpretation of the rule. A meeting will then be held with Corrections to discuss payment of the Inmate Welfare Commission and service logistics if our vendors do receive the ability to service the machines. Requests have been submitted to RSA for approval to purchase vending machines, however, no purchases will be made until an agreement is in place.

Discussions with Coca-Cola and Pepsi have netted great returns on both companies agreeing to provide and maintenance beverage machines at future facilities. This results in a significant savings to the program by not having to purchase beverage machines. For instance, for the Omaha Correctional facilities, the cost savings is \$31,071, a 38.5% reduction in cost for the agency. Machine purchases for one of the Lincoln Correctional facilities will see over \$10,000 in savings resulting in a 39.4% cost reduction. Furthermore, there will be a great deal of future savings not needing to provide maintenance for the machines.

NBE has been contacted by the State Capitol to provide temporary catering services for 18 months during an HVAC project that will shut down the cafeteria. An announcement is being sent to vendors and a tour will take place in February to examine the feasibility of making a lunchroom out of the proposed temporary space.

NBE has received a letter of resignation from the Chair of the committee, Sandy Alvarado. She will be leaving the program as of February 28. A meeting of the Blind Licensee Committee was held January 18 to discuss the election a new committee chairperson and a replacement committee representative. Ross Pollpeter is serving at the Acting Chair and Chris Nolan agreed to serve as the Acting Vice-chair until a new committee member is elected to the Committee through ballot by phone, email or mail. On March 3, Terry Smith from NFBEI will be coming to Nebraska to offer training to Nebraska vendors. He will be giving three presentations and training as well as a Q&A session. In late May or early June, The Committee will host one full-day of training along with exhibitors. An ad hoc planning committee has been developed for the temporary planning and execution of the training.

The first week of December, Carrie, Don, and I went to meet with OFFUTT officers to talk more about running the vending areas and the new cafeteria. As a result, we were informed that we will officially run the 26 break rooms with 52 vending machines. However, the cafeteria is still pending as the Airforce is checking with their National Legal Department about the possibility to give us the contract without having to go through the RFP process.

Staff Quarterly Reports for February 3, 2018 Commission Meeting

Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor

Lincoln District Activity Report

Connie Carlow retired on December 15th. We will miss her. We hired Stephanie Olson to replace her. Stephanie has a background in human services and we are very happy to have her on board. Stephanie spent a week at our training Center and may spend another week there. The support team and I were part of some AWARE training in November.

We hosted Project Search's Business Advisory Council in November. We had 30 to 35 people present. This group is tasked with assisting Project Search graduates find employment. We have one client from our district participating this year.

We also hosted the America's Job Center (AJC) partner forum in December and provided tours to members. The partner forum is made up of mandated and required WIOA partners. We had 15 people in attendance.

We have two people starting Center training.

We completed a twelve week job class with four participants and we will start another one in March.

We had clients get jobs as a sales person, billing clerk, computer systems analyst, and assembly worker. We assisted someone to maintain employment as an auto service tech and as a bookkeeper.

Omaha District Highlights February 2018

Staff Updates: Cheryl Poff retired on 12/22/2018 with 19 years of service to NCBVI.

Kelly worked Winnerfest and attended Fall Foliage at NCECBVI. I know she felt there was a big shift as teachers were reaching out with referrals.

Tim, Kim, and Kathy have been doing networking, attending/working job fairs at the heartland Workforce Solutions (HWS), and attending employer networking events.

Monique, Tim Terrell and I had training on the AWARE bill paying process on November 28.

PIA Meeting is a monthly meeting with aging resources. Kim and Nancy will trade off attending these meeting with Cheryl no longer being here to share information on our services to Older Blind.

We have several clients that are doing some On the Job Experiences and On the Job Training with employers.

Project Search: This year we have two students in Project Search, one from Papillion LaVista, and one from Bellevue. We have another client with the adult program with VoDec at Embassy Suites.

We continue to have Job Club every other Wednesday to keep the focus on finding employment.

We have our transition Skills Group which meets once a week working on job readiness skills (Interests, researching jobs, labor market info, touring businesses etc.). We started this and held the meetings in the community as we have so many high schools within our immediate area and to see a group of students at one time. However, with after school activities we did not have the consistent turnout and will be meeting individually with transition students.

We continue to hold our TAB's Group Teaching. On January 20 the focus will be a college workshop for High School Students and their families. We will focus on our academic support memo,

- College search and comparison of cost per credit hour (Out of state, in-state, private, state and Community College)
- Program of study, credits required per program
- Academic requirements for the college
- Amount of assistance from NCBVI
- Student requirements per quarter/semester
- FAFSA requirements
- Education quest for financial aid and scholarships
- Internet search for scholarships
- Difference between grants and loans
- Office for students with disabilities
- College accommodations
- Campus tour/orientation to campus

Tim Jefferson continues to hold quarterly meetings with parents. He does reach out across the state so counselors know the day, date and topic with a call in number for those that cannot make it in person.

One of the topics under consideration for the next meeting is the role of the para-in the classroom. Parents need to understand that post-secondary education will not have the level of support and all too often para's do too much for the student. It is about having high expectation and positioning our transition students for success in their post-secondary endeavors.

The Tech Committee in which Larry and I have both been a part of has recently completed a Technology Assessment and Work Site Assessment which will be used statewide. This is in an effort to have consistency across the state in our service delivery of technology services.

Erin Brandyberry – North Platte District

The North Platte district has shown great initiative to analyze our spending habits and has found many ways to reduce our spending without compromising the great services that we can provide to our clients. I am very proud of how our team has faced the budget short-falls with the creative thinking and positivity they have produced.

I was elected to the Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board at the end of October 2017, and participated in my first meeting in January. I have already made many contacts through the Board which will be a tremendous asset in many ways. I have also been working diligently on many policies, especially developing our services as it related to severe disabilities and Section 511. I attended two meetings in Kearney at the ESU 10 where I made connections with teachers across the state, advocated for our services, and signed our agency up for presentations at the 2018 Department of Education Transition Conference.

Angie had one client do a 3-day stay in November and started Center training in January, which makes two clients in Center training from the Scottsbluff area. Angie has also presented at the ESU "Youth First Transition Conference" in Scottsbluff, She is on the Board for the Tri-City Active Living Advisory Council to advocate for safe and accessible intersections and walking routes in the community, and she has worked extensively with teachers at WNCC and within ESU13 to aid in the student's success in education. Angie is on Leadership Scottsbluff and is going to Lincoln for a legislative trip.

Diann has participated in the North Platte project search meetings and Cristal has participated in the meetings in Kearney, Grand Island, and Hastings. Diann and I connected with TVIs and the autism network through the Transition Committee. Deanna and Cristal attend the monthly community connections meetings in Kearney. Deanna transitioned the two Lincoln meetings she attended, the Statewide Aged and Disabled Resource Center Advisory Board and the Statewide Brain Injury Advisory Council, to Lincoln staff to be more budget conscious. She continues to serve on the Aging Coalition in Kearney, the Elder Issues in Grand Island, and the Senior Services Advisory Board in Kearney. Cristal attends the Work in Nebraska meetings in Kearney and Grand Island, and is attending the annual AgraAbility (Easter Seals) meeting in Kearney.

We have several clients working toward their educational goals and their vocational goals. We also have several clients in job retention situations that our counselors are working persistently on. We have one client that is in the process of being an NBE vendor and will have several locations in North Platte.

Center's Quarterly Report

Currently: 8 Clients

3 Three Day Stays

3 Students had Mini Meals

2 Staff Trainees Completed Training

Tours: AJC (American Job Center) Partners Forum, Project Search Planning Committee, Union College Social Work Students, Governor's Budget Analyst, and three consumers.

Activities: Activities were temporarily cancelled at this time due to the budget. We are looking at free activities and volunteering possibilities. We are also looking into some activity support from the Friends of the Commission as well as Social Security Reimbursement funds. We are looking at doing activities on a much smaller scale to where maybe we can do one activity per month or every other month depending on cost.

Center Staff: Some Staff continue work with the Tech Committee and attend these meetings, collaborate with the FuZION implementation and testing project, work Winnerfest, attended meetings with the Lincoln Housing Authority, work on obtaining One Touch Self Defense Recertification, work on projects to improve their classes, and continue to take on delegated duties from the Center Supervisor.

Center Supervisor: Continues to work with AWARE issues, attended a financial AWARE training for VR Techs and District Supervisors in Grand Island, was a guest speaker at the Parent Network Meeting in Omaha, completed all of the Center Staff Performance Reviews, attends District Meetings via phone and some face to face, provides support to Supervisors and Staff, attended the Leadership Guide to Discipline Training, Self-Employment Meetings, and FuZION meetings, provided some philosophy training for both staff trainees who completed training, continues to supervise the Center and the Field, will continue to work with NCECBVI to further the agency's partnership, and attended a NFBN Board meeting with the Executive Director to speak in regards to the agency's budget.

Additional Notes: The Center is filling up. We have two Clients that need one on one teaching/training at this time due to severe multiple disabilities.

The Center will also have two new staff trainees in the near future because of the advanced hiring for a new Business Manager III and the rehiring for a Center Supervisor.

Transition Activities – Shane Buresh

As the Board of Commissioners was last meeting on November 4, 15 Pre-ETS youth and a number of staff members were wrapping up a very successful fall Winnerfest. The program was a collaborative effort between NCBVI and We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind. For this workshop however, We Fit Wellness, designed a curriculum that focused on work readiness skills and self-advocacy skills enhancement, but truly incorporated all of the five WIOA Pre-ETS requirements. It was simply entitled: “Exploring Employment”. During this program the youth were empowered to leverage their own unique talents and abilities to become better leaders and team players and be able to more effectively anticipate the future and prepare for the employment process from the interview through day-to-day work. Students were exposed to a wide range of activities some unique to blindness and others which were universal in nature. These included: networking with peers, how to dress to impress, the art of social dancing, how to hunt for jobs with technology designed for the blind like **NFB-NEWSLINE**[®], the ins and outs of entrepreneurship and how you could be your own boss, self-advocacy on the job role plays, explored what the job scape of the future for the blind might look like, conducted a volunteer work experience at a local nursing home facility, engaged in challenging games to build leadership and team building skills, participated in mock interviews which were recorded for future work back in the field with their counselors and watched a movie entitled “Do You Dream in Color?” which is a film about four blind teens coming to age and their challenges to complete school or achieve their goals. Students also engaged in table topic conversations during meals which demonstrated their growing skills in leadership and self-advocacy.

As always this past quarter held plenty of opportunity to create, build and strengthen relationships within the transition and/or blindness fields. Carlos, Carol and I met with several members of NCECBVI management staff to try and strengthen and formalize our joint effort to collaborate on behalf of the consumers/students we both serve. One take away from that meeting, which was finalized, signed and released this week, was a MOU between our organizations which announces our commitment and structure for how we can jointly outreach to our respective clients to enhance participation in both organizations programs. In addition, NCECBVI wishes to continue meetings to keep a dialogue going and we will hold another one of those in February. Also, NCECBVI will be beginning a transition advisory committee with many third party agencies and they have invited me/us to have a seat in that group. Additional aspects of this relationship will be highlighted throughout the meeting on February 3.

Also this quarter, I and several other staff members have begun attending some meetings which are between us, VR and DD to better serve our clients whom we work with in common and to streamline new changes which have come to the DD and VR referral process.

This quarter, I presented at several UNL teacher prep classes with a number of future vision and special education instructors in attendance and as always I make myself available for work with staff in the field and on a few occasions, I assisted them with direct service delivery.

Even though we are now in the midst of snow and cold, it won't be long before spring and summer and the flurry of activity that means for transition will be upon us. As of this writing we are very close to finalizing a service agreement with the NFB to bring their Career Mentoring Program to Nebraska, which will make us among the initial states to offer such a life changing opportunity to the students we serve. More will be said about this in coming reports, but this program will be manifested at times as an overlap to Winnerfest or other programming we currently have done and therefore will be jointly conducted between us and them. For this Winnerfest coming up in the spring however, we will be conducting this in house and the materials for that agenda will be released very soon. It will cover the required Pre-ETS activities and will involve among other things, a volunteer activity, a visit with department of labor, a tour of a local business and more.

Have no fear, we are also planning to hold WAGES and Project Independence in the summer, so stay tuned for more about those next report.

As you can see, there is much to look forward to and I am excited to be able to be present for all of the learning and growth that is about to take place for our youth and to bring back the future report of their successes to you in the upcoming quarters.

Quarterly Highlights from the Client Assistance Program – Shari Bahenski

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

I attended the NCBVI Supervisor meetings, as well as the administrative team meetings.

I met and shared information/resources regarding the Client Assistance Program and Hotline for Disability Services with the new Technology Program Manager, Nancy Burdine.

Technology Program Report - Nancy Burdine

I completed Center Training on December 19. I have been using this past month to acclimate to my position and get the tools in place that I need.

SCCM Software: OCIO is determining what role/access I will need to be able to use SCCM (A management tool for our domain users). They have pushed it to my PC but until the role is defined, the software is not usable.

Remote Access Software: I also received software to remotely access computers on our network. This helps immensely in trouble shooting issues and installing software. This is working as expected; I've already used it a few times.

Access Groups: I received a list of what access groups exist for NCBVI and who are in them. I am working on who needs to be in what groups and whether the group is necessary. Also, will work with OCIO to get access to change group access myself rather than have to go through them. (These groups control folder access on the network as well as admin rights on PC's.)

AWARE/Analytics: Working with OCIO on what is available to get reports from AWARE. Currently our options from the vendor are Tableau or Microsoft Power BI. The state has a 'Microsoft Team' that is working on getting information about Power BI to me.

FuzioN: Bill Brown, Carol Jenkins, Matt Hackert, Julie Buren and Nancy Burdine attended meeting/demonstration with Oracle and the State's FuzioN team. We were able to convey our concerns regarding accessibility and functionality. Also, I reiterated our desire for a test environment as soon as possible.

Tech Committee:

- Will now meet in person once a quarter and have conference calls the other meetings.
 - Evaluating our needs for JAWS Licenses and SMA as well as FuzioN.
 - Discussed what to do with unused agency equipment. Re-purpose/Surplus
- Staying informed on the upcoming FuzioN rollout. Discussed meeting we had with Oracle and the state's FuzioN team.

Bill Brown, Business Manager III

Approvals for NBE equipment to put in Corrections facilities. We received the feds okay to purchased the vending machines to start up the Corrections Areas.

FuzioN accounting program with the state. Attended planning/validation meetings for the Chart of Accounts, Grants and Project, and HR sections. Working with agency staff and FuzioN staff to put together a meeting on accessibility of the system. Meeting was well attended and gave us some insight but it was not as successful of a demonstration as we had hoped. Continuing the dialog on accessibility.

Training with Carrie on Procurement processes. Our schedules have been inconsistent for this training but we will keep moving forward. Carrie has attended some of the Procurement FuzioN meetings. Also working with Carrie to better formalize and make more efficient our contracting and payment processes for Contractual Services. She has been working on a decision tree solution to some of the multiple processes and decisions that can get hung up in the contracting arena.

Working with Carlos, Carol, and supervisors on budget issues and problem solving. We have spent a good amount of time looking at our commitments and what things are

fixed and what we can control in the short term. I think that this has been a very good exercise and will put staff in a better position to address these issues into the future.

Working on the financial piece of AWARE. Received some encouragement from Administrative Services to move forward with this project and worked with Leadership. We have run into some obstacles in the past couple weeks that may slow this down, but I am working with Alliance Enterprises and E1 to best serve the agency.

Look at implications of State budget cuts for present biennium. Trying to keep abreast of the Federal Budget situation and its implications on our program.

Worked on the processes necessary to close our contract with the Department of Defense and to change our registration in the Federal Contract Database (SAM) to facilitate payments from Social Security which changed last spring.

Completed year end Federal Reports.

Single Audit of Vocational Rehabilitation Grant - working with the Auditor's office to satisfy their needs for information.

Working on processes to hire and train my successor after my retirement on August 7, 2018. We have 50 applicants so far.

Bob Deaton, Deputy Director/HR

Finished "Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind in Nebraska: A History." Modified and updated text in the Combined State Plan relevant to NCBVI.

Compiled notes of changes to Chapters 1-4 in NCBVI rules and regulations.

Drafted contract for Gemini Research to conduct a statewide needs assessment for the VR/supported employment/transition programs.

Developed power point presentation for WIOA Partner Council.

Dave Robinson

Stephanie Olson was hired to fill the Voc. Rehab. Tech. position in Norfolk. Stephanie comes to the agency from the Grand Island Veteran's Home. Stephanie began her duties with the agency on November 27, 2017 and was able to work alongside Connie Carlow for three weeks.

Josie Rodriguez retired on November 16, 2017.

Connie Carlow retired on December 15, 2017.

Cheryl Poff retired on December 22, 2017.

Bob Deaton announced his retirement, effective January 31, 2018.

Bill Brown announced his retirement, effective August 7, 2018.

Due to the complexity and numerous duties/facets of Bill's position, the agency received permission from State Personnel to advertise for Bill Brown's replacement immediately, so that the candidate chosen can work alongside Bill for about five months, hopefully making for a smooth transition into this critical position. Bob Deaton's position will not be refilled and the savings the agency will realize from not filling the position will be used to fund the new Business Manager III to work alongside Bill.

The job posting for Bill's position opened up on January 2, 2018 and will remain open until filled. We received 50 applications and decided to withdraw the job posting, presuming that out of 50 applications, we should be able to establish a strong interview pool. If we do not establish an interview pool, we always have the option of re-posting the notice.

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant

The 2017 Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral. It has also been posted to the NCBVI website.

I am beginning to work on fixed asset scanning for 2018 inventory.

I continue to work with Bob Deaton to get NCBVI Rules and Regulations ready to be set for a Public Hearing.

The 2018 State Staff meeting has been cancelled.

I worked on a project to clean up the NCBVI W: Drive. I currently do not have access to move folders and document in the VR folder and I am working with Nancy Burdine to address this issue.

NCBVI had/will have seven state vehicles replaced with new models. (two Lincoln vehicles, two Omaha vehicles, one Norfolk vehicle, one Kearney vehicle and one North Platte vehicle)

I attended Records Management training on Disaster Recovery.

Nebraska Business Enterprise - Carrie DeFreece

Facilities

There is little new to report regarding facilities, however working on increasing opportunities. The Camp Ashland Dining Facility Contract ended December 22, 2017. NBE staff assisted in closing out accounts for the contractor, completing inventory of military equipment and goods purchased and closing out the facility.

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Vendors (Licensees)

NBE has received a letter of resignation from the Chair of the committee, Sandy Alvarado, and she will be leaving the program as of February 28. A meeting of the Blind Licensee Committee was held January 18 to discuss election a new Committee Chairperson and a replacement committee representative. Ross Pollpeter is serving at the Acting Chair and Chris Nolan agreed to serve as the Acting Vice-Chair until a new committee member is elected to the Committee through ballot by phone, email or mail. On March 3, Terry Smith from the National Association of Blind Merchants will be coming to Nebraska to offer training to Nebraska vendors. He will be giving three presentations and training as well as a Q&A session. In late May or early June, the Committee will host one full-day of training along with exhibitors. An ad hoc planning committee has been developed for the temporary planning and execution of the training.

Budget and Biennium Update

This fiscal year, our Reallotment request was turned down by our federal partners as much of those extra grant funds went to Hurricane disaster relief. Therefore, it is very important that we retain the funds the state has budgeted for us for immediate needs and for the potential of capturing federal funds in the future.

Director Serván reported that with the State and the Federal appropriation, NCBVI's overall budget is 4.2 million dollars. We were spending from 6 to 6.5 million dollars before and we were receiving about \$750,000 in reallotment funds and another \$470,000 in social security reimbursement. Out of those 4.2 million dollars, 3.2 million dollars is spent in areas like salaries, benefits and other things we cannot change. Therefore, we only have 1 million dollars for services and extra items. If you count

reallotment money and social security money, as we did for the past eight years, this is way more than 1 million dollars. This past year, we only received \$85,000 for reallotment so it is a huge impact.

NCBVI currently has 1.5 million dollars of carryover funds, but if we just spend that money we will be in big trouble. Therefore, we decided to start cutting all those extra things that we added during the last eight years. We received approximately \$440,000 for social security reimbursement and we will use 10% of that (or around \$40,000) for older blind services. The rest of the social security reimbursement funds will be used on vending machines. NCBVI will not be purchasing new vending machines unless we receive social security reimbursement or reallotment.

At this point, NCBVI has received three small awards from the Continuing Resolutions. We have been going on the premise that the Federal grant will be the same that it was last year. We will not know for sure until later. We are somewhat fortunate in that we do have carryover funds from last year. We did just receive some social security reimbursement funds and the Federal government does require that we spent this money first. This will keep our carryover funds sitting there for about another month. However, when April or May rolls around, it could get a little strange. NCBVI's critical period could come about August 2019 if things keep going as we project them to be. The social security reimbursement money we receive does give us some leverage.

Director Serván will testify before the Appropriations Committee asking to have our 2% and 4% cuts reinstated; exempt of the cuts as was the Nebraska General VR agency. NCBVI provides most of our services directly, staff to client, so our services are a little more intense given the disability group we work with and there are no other comparable private resources available in Nebraska. Due to changes in Federal law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), this year it is critical for us to keep our funding as we are getting more and more referrals with multiple disabilities in addition to blindness. Furthermore, the Federal government is not including in their proposed budget funds for Supported Employment, a program strictly designed to provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities.

Public Comment

Crystal Platt – Crystal inquired about the framework for NCBVI's budget hearing before the Appropriations Committee on February 7.

Chair Hansen noted that the Budget Hearing is scheduled to begin at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 7. Director Serván reported that while the hearing starts at 1:30 p.m., there are six agencies that will go before NCBVI. Therefore, the exact time that NCBVI will testify is not known. Director Serván noted that he plans to be there by 2:00 p.m. Director Serván stated that as a State Director he has to testify at the hearing. Consumers can also testify at the hearing; however, they should be prepared to limit their testimony and try not to repeat testimony offered by previous persons who testified. Individuals who testify are also encouraged to have prepared their testimony

in writing. It is also helpful to bring enough copies to distribute to all committee members, the two committee staff members, media and the transcribers' office. Fifteen copies is usually enough to accomplish this. If written testimony is lengthy, it can be distributed and summarized orally to conserve the committee's time. Testimony should basically state how the services of NCBVI help blind people in Nebraska and how a cut to NCBVI's budget would impact services.

Newsline® Update

Bryan Baldwin, Outreach Coordinator

This report is only going to include the months of November and December 2017 as the numbers for January will not be out in enough time to get this report completed. I have begun my time as Outreach Coordinator by going through some training with Jamie, learning as much as I can about the ins and outs of NEWSLINE. I have also spoken with Scott White in Baltimore who runs Newsline and have been offered the ability to go to Baltimore for a 5-day training session on how to be an Outreach Coordinator for Newsline. I have also made the suggestion to switch out the welcome letter process to be done from Baltimore to help get people their welcome packet a little faster. I am also making steps to get the application process streamlined straight to me instead of it going all the way to Baltimore and then to me. I am also making steps to get our counselors at NCBVI to encourage their clients to sign up for Newsline, and if the client doesn't have an email address, to work with the client on obtaining their own email address, so that the client can use that in the application instead of the counselor's email, which is frowned upon. I will also be looking at giving more presentations, especially after taking the class in Baltimore, where I believe that presentations are one of the classes they teach. I am doing all of this because I believe the subscribers are plateauing and I want to do more to pick those numbers back up. I am also trying to get customers to send me feedback on things they would like to see different with Newsline that is within my abilities. I look forward to doing as much as I can for Newsline.

This holiday season Newsline released their holiday ads for Target and Walmart, but have added many others this year including Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Jo-Ann Fabrics, Kohl's, Lowe's, Office Depot, Staples, Toys R Us, and Walgreen's. Newsline is also trying to get their customers to give feedback on their app to help release a better product during the next updates. Now onto the Nebraska numbers.

November only saw 3 new subscribers, while December only saw 1. This is what I am talking about with plateauing and how I am going to try to get these numbers back up. The total call minutes for November are 18,910. The local call percentage has seen a rise to 55.32%. It seems most people are using their Victor Stream to access Newsline with 2239 accesses in November, followed by telephone, email, webpage, and the mobile app bringing in the rear with 350 visits in November. More Nebraska publications were viewed than National publications in November. For the month of December, the total call minutes were 18,454 with 56.75% local calling. There was a spike in visitors as the Victor Stream still sat at number 1 with 3128 visits, followed by the telephone, email, webpage, and once again the app bringing in the rear but with a jump from 350 visits to

474 visits. Once again, the local publications were visited far more than the national publications.

Let me know if you would like to see more numbers or less in these reports as I have read Jamie's and they had more numbers than what I've just put in. Feel free to email me or call at any time.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

By: Shari Bahenski

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

Shari attended the NCBVI Supervisor meetings, as well as the administrative team meetings. Shari also met and shared information/resources regarding the Client Assistance Program and Hotline for Disability Services with the new Technology Program Manager, Nancy Burdine.

Director Serván reported that CAP will be hiring a new CAP director as Shari has returned to her previous position. Interviews were held last week and second interviews will be held. The person who is hired will go through some Center training.

Anonymous Staff Suggestion Box Comments

There were no comments in the anonymous staff suggestion box.

Break

A break was taken at 11:55 a.m. The meeting resumed at 12:10 p.m.

New Business

Discuss and Set Meeting Dates and Topics for 2018

Chair Hansen noted that according to the Nebraska Open Meeting Act, no more than one-half of the public body's meetings in a calendar year can be held by videoconferencing.

May 5, 2018, Omaha, NE. Annual evaluation of the executive director.

August 4, 2018, North Platte, NE. NCBVI's new relationship with Developmental Disabilities with the changes in WIOA.

November 3, 2018, Nebraska City, NE. Tour the NCECBVI School and learn more about what they do. Chair Hansen will reach out to NCECBVI to see if this works with their schedule.

February 2, 2019, Lincoln, NE. To be determined. Some suggestions are: Friends of the Commission, Center Supervisor's game plan for the Center and Snapshot of what is happening across the country as it relates to VR and blindness agencies.

Public Comment

Barbara Epworth – Barbara asked for clarification on the discussion of the video.

Chair Hansen stated that one of NCBVI's Board members, Chad Bell, is attending today's meeting via video conference from NCBVI's Scottsbluff office. Commissioner Bell is not physically at today's meeting. The Nebraska Open Meeting Act states that video-conferencing of a public meeting can take place no more than one-half of the public body's meetings in a calendar year. NCBVI is doing video-conferencing at some public meetings as a convenience to the Board member and as an effort to cut down on travel expenses.

Bob Deaton – Bob suggested that with the changes in WIOA he feels a good Focus Topic would be “Serving people with multiple disabilities and NCBVI's new relationship with Developmental Disabilities.” The commissioners made this the Focus Topic for the August meeting in North Platte.

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on May 5, 2018 in Omaha, Nebraska. There will be no Focus Topic as the commissioners will conduct the annual evaluation of the executive director.

Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the May 5, 2018 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Mike Hansen, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners