

Joint Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2000
State Rehabilitation Council
and
Nebraska Commission for the Blind and
Visually Impaired

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) had a year of firsts in the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2000. The former Rehabilitation Services for the Visually Impaired became a separate Commission through legislation passed and signed into law by the Governor on April 10, 2000. Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired came into being officially on July 1, 2000. Meetings of the SRC were held in February, May, August and November in Lincoln, Valentine, Nebraska City and Lincoln. Elections were held at the first quarterly meeting in February. By year's end, all council positions with persons representing mandated groups were filled. A New Member's Training, with expanded packets, was held prior to the August meeting. Several of the new Commissioners attended this training. The first meeting of the Commissioners convened in the afternoon of the same day.

Two new grants were awarded to NCBVI, which the council had been following. A Transition grant was received for 5 years at \$275,000 per year. This grant will provide services to individuals 14-26, focusing on employment outcomes. Three new transition counselors will be hired, one for each district. A grant was also received from the Helen Keller National Center. This grant is in the amount of \$50,000. A Deaf-Blind coordinator was hired, who is located in Omaha. The Older Individuals who are Blind grant was received in the amount of \$225,000. The grant then became formula funded by the Congress in 12/99. This awarded NCBVI with an additional \$214,000. The SRC did make the recommendation that the Visually Impaired Peer Support network reduce their conventions from two to one, to allow funds to be utilized elsewhere. This change has been made with only one convention held in the Spring beginning in 2001. Social Security Reimbursement has become another source of funds. \$124,000 has been received with 100% of the applications for reimbursement being accepted as of the August 5th meeting. With a new Commission, budget and funding has been a challenge. The Director has explained in great detail the budgeting process to the SRC. As of the November meeting, a shortage of \$44,698 for matching funds was reported. A budget deficit request was submitted by November 9th, requesting funds from the unicameral. "Friends of the Commission" has been established by the NCBVI Commissioners. This is a fundraising entity.

The SRC reviewed the surveys used 6 months after training at the Orientation Center has been completed and 6 months after case closure of Rehabilitation and Independent Living Clients. The Placement Committee, formed last year as a result of consumer comments continued to meet in 2000 with a focus toward home-based businesses and self-employment.

Work by the committee looking at financial means testing, now termed, financial participation, has completed their work. Public hearings would now be needed to determine whether NCBVI would institute a financial participation policy. The SRC will receive a working draft to review prior to their February 2001 meeting. A decision will then be made as to whether to recommended that this project be pursued to the Commissioners.

Newsline for the Blind continued its growth in its second year. All Nebraskans have access via toll free lines. Jobline became available this year. Jobline provides dial up access to America's Job Bank. It is available to anyone, not just individuals who are Blind.

Caseload statistics indicate an increase in the number of those closed successful (26) in the Vocational Rehabilitation track. 107 successful closures were attained, compared to 80 last year. The NCBVI staff focus on employment outcome for Clients and outreach to employers shows its success in these numbers.

A comprehensive list of SRC members, including e-mail addresses was developed and distributed to members. Much of the information going to Council members can now be done through e-mail, reducing costs and increasing efficiency. For those who do not have access to e-mail, traditional mail is still being utilized. The Director has instituted "Moving Forward" messages keeping Council members, Commissioners and Staff apprised of changes and developments in the transition and establishment of the Commission. It was suggested that these updates continue with individuals without e-mail receiving the updates in their preferred format.

With a full council, and a council showing a great deal of interest and enthusiasm for the business of NCBVI, open communication and collaboration seems to have been established. As the SRC and NCBVI look to the coming year, the goal of defining the role of the SRC in light of the Commission will be undertaken. The desire is to make sure that the two groups are not duplicating efforts and that we are making the best use of funds available.