

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC MEETING
SATURDAY, JULY 28, 2001, 9:00 A.M.

APPROVED

Call to Order and Introductions:

Commissioners present were: Chairman, Barbara Walker; Bob Burns; Bill Orester; Maya Samms and Dorothy Westin-Yockey.

Commission staff present were: Pearl Van Zandt, Bob Deaton, Carlos Serván, Jan Ludwig, Bill Brown, Fatos Floyd, Connie Daly, James Juarez, Larry Roos.

Members of the Public present were: John Fullerton, Dick Zlab, Ruth Haffke, James Faimon, Steve Speicher, Michael Floyd and Fritz Yockey.

Announcement Concerning Public Comments:

Walker gave the invitation to those present to feel free to bring requests, limited in length, to the chairman. If anyone has an issue on the agenda item being dealt with at the time, those will be acknowledged by the chairman as time permits.

Minutes of the May 19, 2001 Meeting:

Orester moved for approval, Burns seconded and the May 19, 2001 minutes were approved.

Minutes of the June 13, 2001 Telephone Conference Meeting:

Orester moved for approval, Burns seconded and the telephone conference meeting minutes were approved with the addition of the June 13, 2001 date being added.

Field Operations Overview:

The focus of today's meeting was on NCBVI's field operations. The presenters were Carlos Serván, Deputy Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Bob Deaton, Deputy Director of Independent Living.

Orester requested the Radio Talking Book item be moved ahead on the agenda out of respect for the people in attendance because of this issue. The Chairman acknowledged the request and there was general consensus among the Board to move this item ahead.

Radio Talking Book Overview:

John Fullerton presented information on Radio Talking Book Services. He gave detailed information on the Listening Link portion, which included that RTB has recorded 49 textbooks this school term for students. Colleges and schools make payments to RTB at a rate of \$4.50 per tape; however, Burns expressed concern about why RTB isn't charging more for the recording of textbooks so as to be at least "a break even" service. Dick Zlab played a tape recording from Mark Carta, Director of Academic Support Services at Metro Community College, phone number 402-457-2641. Ruth Haffke spoke in support of Radio Talking Book. Fullerton read several notes of appreciation from clientele and a letter from Governor Johanns. NCBVI Board encouraged RTB to work with national recording groups to avoid duplication of services available. The following question was asked, "Do you have a reserve set aside in case of emergencies?" Fullerton responded affirmatively and indicated a one year reserve is set aside. Steve Speicher spoke to the NCBVI Board encouraging the support be continued to RTB as to assist the student.

NCBVI Board requested information of Fullerton on a breakdown of costs of their services and he in turn will make this information available to Van Zandt and the Board of Commissioners. Chairman of the RTB Board, James Faimon, concluded the presentation with a statement of support.

Financial Participation Survey:

Van Zandt presented what the law allows in regards to Financial Participation and assured that assessment would not be on the main services we provide. Those on SSI or SSDI would never be expected to participate financially. The law also prohibits the implementation of Financial Participation due to a shortage of funds. Brown expressed concern on how to track this if it is implemented. Walker expressed concern on the issue. Van Zandt expressed her concerns on the issue and questions what we would get in funding versus the results of staff's involvement and extra time. Is it worth it? She is leaning more closely toward dealing with comparable benefits. Van Zandt would like to move toward seeing that NCBVI staff be very well trained in comparable benefits to enable them to work with their clients so they can make use of other sources and not only depend on the Commission to provide a service that may be available from another resource. We have received information from New Mexico that provides a framework for helping the rehabilitation counselor and the client go through what might be available from other resources. Walker asked for a response. Westin-Yockey expressed interest in looking at comparable benefits and to give staff training so they are aware of all areas to find those benefits. Burns moved and Westin-Yockey seconded that Financial Participation will not be put in place at this time. The motion passed unanimously.

Report from the Chairman:

During the Chairman's meeting with the Director on her performance evaluation, there was suggestion as to possibly looking at reversing the rating scale used in evaluating the Director. Walker offered that the rating scale used be changed to: 1 unacceptable, 2 needs improvement, 3 satisfactory, 4 above average and 5 outstanding.

She offered to contact Karen Billings as to the change. Westin-Yockey moved and Samms seconded that we reverse the rating scale that was used and now go from 1 to 5 with 5 being outstanding. Motion passed unanimously. Van Zandt did add to this year's evaluation language stating that she has met with the Board Chairman and agreed with contents of the evaluation. Walker suggested incorporating language of agreement or lack thereof into the evaluation form itself. Orester moved and Samms seconded that language be included as to agreement. Burns amended the motion to read that a signature line will indicate the receipt thereof, review of the evaluation and a section provided for comments. The motion unanimously passed. The Chairman shared that she participated in two Commission-sponsored events--an awards celebration honoring employers of the blind on June 4 and a regional symposium on June 21-23. She emphasized that Commissioners should attend such things when possible. She reported on the recent writing of a grant under the Nebraska Technology Works Project. The Chairman has written a letter of appreciation to the staff for their time and effort in submitting an application for this grant. The Director will disseminate this letter through e-mail to staff.

Report from the Executive Director Staff Updates:

Sahar Husseini has been hired to fill the communications position in the Center and will begin her employ July 30, 2001. Amy Buresh was hired as transition counselor. Betty Buresh's staff assistant position has been upgraded to a Rehab Tech. Cizette Ingram's last day was July 20, 2001. Jeff Altman will be returning the later part of August. Carol Frink replaced Char Shives as staff assistant. There have been 12 students participating in WAGES this year and the response from their employers has been positive. An application for a Technology Grant was submitted and we should know the outcome toward the end of August. A Mini Grant was prepared and submitted by Serván to the Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities and a decision on that will be the first of September. DigitalNews has been working diligently with the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation. Through information gained from their efforts, we are proposing that this Foundation, fund a piece of the Technology Grant that applies directly to the Omaha area.

IL and VR statistics were given via e-mail as well as being available in different media at today's meeting. Van Zandt offered to include the Center statistics in the future and the Board was in agreement that this would be good information to have. The NCBVI Administrative Team is continuing to meet with positive results. Every two weeks this group is also meeting over lunch for a philosophy seminar. Serván will be sending the articles used for this training to the Board. Van Zandt said the Board is welcome to send material for discussion as well.

Old Business

Materials Update - Some on the Board are experiencing problems reading some of the materials being sent; however, this will improve with time. NCBVI has never required RTB to document match in what we provide for them in outreach for RTB. Burns moved that after RTB has supplied NCBVI with the requested information, that we conduct a telephone conference meeting (within a week of receipt), to discuss the contract renewal. Westin-Yockey seconded the motion and it passed. Brown will research the match issue.

Budget Update -

Brown and Van Zandt gave information on the budget. Brown received an official telephone call from the Governor's Office advising that there may be a 5% cut across the board. But that 5% cut for us would be a \$126,000 impact because of the match. Burns will draft a letter to Nebraska Senators, the Governor and the Appropriations Committee. Walker will proof and make suggestions before it is sent. Van Zandt encouraged all interested, including consumers other than the Board, to individually contact their Senators and the Governor too.

CPQ Update -

Desk audits have been occurring. We should be receiving a report.

Website Update -

Nebraska Online is working on getting each one of the Board members set up so they can be reached directly by e-mail from the Website. There is also work being done to create a mailing list of people who might be interested in getting timely information about events or activities within NCBVI. There may also be a possibility of an individual doing an internship in networking, the Website, or other technical areas for NCBVI. Newsline ® Channel 2 is available to get information out to folks who do not have computers.

Friends of the Commission Update -

Mike Floyd reported a meeting is set for the week after next. Van Zandt stated that the State Rehabilitation Council will be spending some time at its next meeting addressing fundraising issues.

DigitalNews Update -

DigitalNews has received \$1,000 from Telephone Pioneers. A report of Newsline ® was given and as of July 14, 2001 there are 426 Newsline ® subscribers.

NCBVI Policies -

Van Zandt reported that the NE Business Enterprise policies have been looked at by RSA and there are some minor changes that will be forthcoming. We have staff looking at other agencies' Rules and Regulations. Drafts of the various rules developed will be provided to the Board for consideration. Those drafts are then presented at public hearings and other formal steps required will be followed. The Secretary of State's Office will have a workshop on training in late August. That is good timing for us. Van Zandt suggested that the major focus next time be to formalize the draft rules. Walker agreed to put this on the agenda for the next meeting.

Public Comment There was none.

New Business

Walker stated that new officers need to be elected. Burns moved and Samms seconded to nominate Walker as chairman and Orestor as vice chairman. Motion passed unanimously. Westin-Yockey moved for Samms to continue as Executive Session Secretary. Burns seconded and the vote was affirmative.

Placement Issue

Van Zandt gave a report on sheltered workshop employment placements in each District. There have been about six in recent years, located in Lincoln, Omaha, and Norfolk. In every case, the individuals had multiple disabilities, and the resulting placement was clearly their choice. Some factors involved were health and mental health issues, having friends at the sheltered workshop, limited skills and capacity, etc. The individuals are very proud of the work they do. Serván added that although clients certainly do have the right to choose sheltered employment as their goal and their IEP may be reflective of this goal, agencies are precluded from counting this as successfully employed and a 26 Closure. These regulations were adopted this year. Van Zandt reported that the Commission staff do not route people with multiple disabilities to workshops, but do not place barriers for those who choose this work. It was also mentioned that in several cases, the effort was made to set up Supported Employment, but that did not work out.

Location, Date and Time of Next Meeting -

Walker asked if people want time frames to be set on the agenda in the future. Samms moved and Westin-Yockey seconded that the chairman set time frames for agenda topics. The vote was affirmative. Burns moved that the next meeting be in Omaha, November 17, 2001, 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M., including a working lunch. Westin-Yockey seconded the motion and it passed. Technology will be the focus for the next meeting.

Samms moved and Burns seconded to request that Jonathon Ross give a 45-minute presentation on NCBVI's technology program. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Ludwig, Staff Assistant Barbara Walker, Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners