

**SECTION 1
NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
ANNUAL CALENDAR REPORT FOR 2001**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
FINANCIAL	3
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM.....	3
TRANSITION PROGRAM	4
TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM	6
ORIENTATION CENTER.....	6
INDEPENDENT LIVING-OLDER BLIND PROGRAM	8
DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM.....	9
<u>NEWSLINE</u>[®] FOR THE BLIND	10
REFERRAL SERVICES	11

**SECTION 2
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM**

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL CALENDAR REPORT FOR 2001

I INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Commission) is the State agency that provides a variety of services enabling blind people to become fully participating, contributing members of society. Blind people lead normal lives, have families, raise children, participate in community activities, and work in a wide range of jobs. The real challenge is to educate blind people about their own potential and to educate society about the ability of the blind to contribute. The following programs and services provide the means by which blind persons may regain a productive role in society:

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Technology
- Independent Living-Older Blind
- Transition
- Deaf-Blind
- Business Enterprise
- Digital Voice Newspaper Delivery System (NEWSLINE®)

The Commission uses surveys to quantify client satisfaction and to seek input for improvement. These three surveys are completed at different times. The Orientation Center Survey is completed three months after training at the Orientation Center has been completed and The Rehabilitation Track Survey and the Independent Living Survey are completed six months after case closure.

On September 30, 2001, the Commission completed the first year of the Helen Keller National Center Grant and the first year of the Transition Grant. The Older Individuals Who Are Blind Grant became formula-funded by Congress in December 1999. Social Security Reimbursement has become another source of funds and, as of September 30, 2001, 100% of the applications for reimbursement have been accepted. During our first Federal Fiscal Year, the Commission was able to obtain its full federal-funding match. The "Friends of the Commission" has been established in order to obtain matching funds from local sources. They are awaiting approval from the IRS as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit group.

II FINANCIAL REPORT

• Basic Support:		
A. -Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	2,303,181
B. -Aid	\$	602,450
• Older Blind Program	\$	225,000
• Independent Living Program	\$	33,329
• Supported Employment	\$	30,000
• Transition	\$	275,000
• Deaf-Blind	\$	50,000
• Social Security Reimbursement	\$	144,128

III VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

The VR program seeks job opportunities for individuals who are blind with the goal of assisting them in becoming productive members of society. In rehabilitating such individuals, the Commission provides training and placement in jobs that are appropriate to each individual's capabilities, abilities, potentials, and informed choice. Some of the services that may be provided are: training in the skills of blindness, vocational education, counseling and guidance, job training, job development, and assistive technology services. During fiscal year 2001, 631 Nebraskans received vocational rehabilitation services and 59 consumers were successfully employed in a variety of jobs. 23 individuals were successfully closed as Homemakers, which allows them full participation in their homes, eliminating the need to rely on the nursing-home system. The Commission performed satisfactorily according to the newly mandated Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) standards and indicators.

Commission VR Counselors work diligently with employers throughout the State, to educate them about the potential of the blind by providing power-point presentations and to inform them about reasonable accommodations that will not lower their expectations of productivity. Consumers were placed in a variety of jobs, such as Administrators, Teachers, Assembly Workers, Lawyers, Clerical Workers, Telephone Operators, Human Services Professionals, Farmers, Case Workers, Engineers, Counselors, and Small Business Owners, among others.

Staff development continues as an important facet of improving the quality of services to our consumers. The entire staff continues to receive training on job development and job placement, enabling them to provide better services to our consumers. The Commission emphasizes quality competitive employment; not just the first available job, but full-time jobs that will provide consumers good wages, benefits and the potential for upward mobility.

Counseling and guidance is available to families who want to better understand blindness and to support family members who are blind or visually impaired in their pursuit of personal and vocational goals. The Commission promotes a positive understanding of blindness and the abilities of people who are blind to the general public. This is done through educational programs designed to reach employers, educators, health care professionals, human services agencies, and other individuals and organizations that come into contact with individuals who are blind.

VR Services also include career exploration, interest testing, and vocational planning. Assistance with tuition, books, adaptive technology, and readers is available to those pursuing vocational training. When an individual is ready for employment, job placement and follow-up services are provided. Our counselors are constantly working with employers to encourage hiring of qualified blind job seekers. One of our counselors also helped to develop a device (Teletalk) that allows blind and visually impaired individuals to operate a multi-line telephone switchboard.

'Round Tuit: This three-day summer program provides blind and visually impaired job seekers practical information and guidance regarding what it takes to get and keep a job.

IV TRANSITION PROGRAM

The Transition Program at the Commission is a special project funded by a federal grant through RSA. Employment experiences for blind and visually impaired students and young adults are too often not available as they grow up, and the Transition program is specifically focused on creating and supporting those opportunities across the state. Three Transition Counselors and one Transition Coordinator work with students-ages 14 to 26 years old. They work to develop positive relationships with schools, families, and employers in their communities. Work opportunities and other special programs for transition students are designed to provide real life work experiences, job skills, and a work history, all of which contribute significantly to eventual success in the workplace as adults.

The WAGES program (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) provided work experience for ten Nebraska students this past summer here in Lincoln, with four other students working in similar settings in their own communities. During the first week of the program, students get intensive cane travel instruction in order to get familiar with the campus area and are then able to get to and from work independently each day. Throughout the program, students build their self-esteem by participating in weekly seminars involving discussions regarding blindness issues, and are exposed to adult blind role models who held competitive jobs and can answer many questions for the students. Transition personnel are in constant contact with employers during the duration of the program in order to insure the success of our students at the work place. The staff also works to educate employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of individuals who are blind.

The Transition Program staff worked closely with Lincoln Lancaster County, Bryan Memorial Hospital, the Food Bank, the Folsom Children's Zoo, the State Ombudsman's office, the Talking Book and Braille Library and the Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church in Lincoln, where the students performed a variety of jobs. This program was a partnership with Lincoln Action Program, which paid most of the salaries for the ten students working in Lincoln. As a result of our collaboration, the Lancaster County Commissioners presented us with a Certificate of Appreciation for both the employees provided through the programs and the opportunity to work with the Commission. Lancaster County also provided opportunities for two Orientation Center students to work part-time in the last three months of their center training through a program called "Opportunity Knocks". One student worked at the Records Management Division and another was employed in the Aging Office of Lancaster County Central Kitchen.

"Keys to College Success", and "Winnerfest" are two other special programs designed to provide transition students with the skills and information they need to participate fully in the academic experience and in the employment search. These programs cover a variety of topics, from resume building to disclosure of one's disability to social skills and workplace behavior. Project Independence is another program designed for younger children, ages 6 to 13, and is an excellent opportunity for blind and visually impaired youngsters to observe blind adults in their work environments, using alternative skills, and demonstrating success in the workplace. In 2000-2001, there were 10 children at Project Independence, 26 at College Prep, and 33 students participated in the two Winnerfest sessions.

The Changing Times Transition newsletter is published four times a year, and provides information, resources, and interesting articles on transition and opportunities available across the state.

A Transition Workshop was presented in October in collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska-Parents Division, public schools and Commission staff, which was directed toward parents and students as well as school and Commission personnel.

The Nebraska Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired is a collaborative effort among the Commission, Department of Education, school districts, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired and other entities. Its primary purpose is to share information with each other, advise and seek to improve relations and services, and promote an understanding of the issues and critical needs of the students involved in the education and transition process.

The Transition Coordinator, along with the three Transition Counselors, is actively participating in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln-Lancaster and Greater Nebraska.

V TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

Computer access equipment enables individuals who are blind or visually impaired to acquire skills necessary to compete effectively in vocational training and employment.

The Commission's Technology Program is the heart of computer training for blind consumers in Nebraska. This program employs three full-time Technology Specialists located in Omaha, Lincoln and North Platte, and provides training and consultation to blind consumers and employers across the state. During the past year over 300 evaluations were completed. Additionally, over 120 computer systems were designed, configured, and delivered to consumers. Technology services were provided to consumers via telephone and e-mail. Consultations were also provided to the Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Nebraska Department of Corrections, University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, The Gallup Organization, Marriott Hotel Reservations, United Parcel Service, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Greyhound Bus Lines, Workforce Investment System, Nebraska Department of Labor and public schools, among others. The capability to provide loaner equipment to consumers and employers is another service provided by the technology program.

Our technology specialists utilize adaptive software for consumers' on-the-job settings. Many times, only small changes are required to make the blind person's job much easier and more competitive. The focus continues to be on demonstrating speech systems for Windows 98 and 2000. Windows-based applications with speech and magnification are taught. Dragon Dictate voice recognition system is valuable for consumers who cannot physically use a keyboard.

The Commission's technology specialists are constantly researching in order to keep up with changes in technology and to have it available to consumers and employers.

VI ORIENTATION CENTER

The Orientation and Adjustment Center is a comprehensive 8-hour a day, 5-day a week program located in Lincoln. It provides intensive training in the techniques used by successful blind persons in a program designed to build self-confidence. This training includes instruction in areas such as independent travel using a white cane, public transportation, community access, homemaking, apartment living, typing, adaptive technology, Braille, and woodworking. Training may last up to nine months as students learn to apply alternative techniques to solve problems facing them in everyday life. During the training, students reside in apartments in downtown Lincoln provided by the Commission.

The Center also engages in an ongoing program of public education to promote the integration of blind persons into jobs, home and community. The Center invites individuals and groups to come in for tours to view the various features of Center training and promote the potential of blind persons. Participants have included students from public schools and colleges, vision teachers from educational institutions, government officials, personnel of other governmental agencies, and employers.

Attitude and techniques training are fully integrated; the attitude training motivates the student to learn and excel at alternative techniques, and learning the techniques allows the student to put his or her new attitudes of confidence into practice. In addition to training in alternative techniques, the Center provides introductory course work in the following areas:

- College Preparation
- Vending Facility Management
- Cooking and Food Service
- Typing and Word Processing
- Computer Operation
- Power Machinery Use and Hand Tool Operation

Center students must be legally blind or have a condition which will lead to legal blindness and must be capable of functioning in a training program which lasts eight hours a day, five days a week. A tour of the facility is scheduled, followed by an interview with the Center's Director.

During the training, all students use sleep shades to eliminate the desire to rely on inadequate vision, to build self-confidence and to help students learn how to think and function successfully as blind persons. Once the cycle of dependence on inadequate sight is broken and the students have learned non-visual techniques by reflex, they are able to make informed decisions regarding when to use their remaining sight.

During this calendar year, the Orientation Center provided intensive training to 37 blind persons. Additionally, four Commission staff members participated in the twelve-week Staff Training Program, and three completed a three-week refresher program. The Center also has started to assist the Business Enterprise Program staff in evaluating prospective vendors.

Students obtain experience in traveling through airports and shopping malls, using public bus transportation, shuttle services and taxi cabs. They also experience traveling in heavier populated areas. To build students' self-confidence and skills, Center training involves activities such as camping trips, hiking trips, swimming, and horseback riding.

Students continue to take increased responsibility for the operations of the Center - a direct result of the Center's belief in the abilities of blind people. When Center students realize that they can hold jobs, raise a family, and be valued members of the community, their lives change. Students then look forward to the future with a zest and willingness to meet life's challenges.

VII INDEPENDENT LIVING-OLDER BLIND PROGRAM

The Older Blind Program serves individuals age 55 or older who are legally blind or who have a progressive eye disease leading to blindness. The Independent Living Program serves blind individuals under the age of 55. The purpose of the Independent Living-Older Blind (IL/OB) Program is to enable blind individuals to live more independently in their homes and communities. Direct services are provided to individuals in their homes and in-group settings in Commission offices. Through the Independent Living and Older Blind programs, individuals receive training and encouragement to continue living fulfilling lives with dignity and independence.

There were a total of 1,015 consumers served through the IL/OB programs during the calendar year 2001; 799 were over age 55 (OB program) while 216 were under age 55 and were in the IL program.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired receive training in the alternative skills needed to pursue personal and vocational goals. Instruction typically begins in the home, focusing on such areas as cane travel, Braille, and homemaking. Those needing more intensive instruction often move on to training in the Orientation Center.

Nine Independent Living/Older Blind teachers serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved and unserved populations, especially those in rural areas. The teachers provide the training, guidance and counseling necessary to promote positive attitudes, and encourage consumers to regain active and productive lives. Instruction for the newly blind person may include training in the skills of blindness, such as Braille instruction; orientation and mobility, including learning to use public transportation and orientation to the individual's neighborhood and community facilities; and personal and home management skills including meal preparation, identification of coins and currency, telling time, instruction in the use of NEWSLINE (digital voice newspaper service accessed via touch-tone telephone), Talking Book Library (Braille and audio-cassette books and magazines), Radio Talking Book (voice newspaper service accessed via closed circuit radio and television Secondary Audio Program-SAP), and other activities of daily living. Assistive technology devices and various aids may be provided to help individuals become more self-sufficient, including long white canes, Braille writing equipment, talking calculators, talking glucometers, Closed Circuit TVs (to read regular or large print), magnifiers, and Braille or talking watches.

Comprehensive outreach continues to provide information, consultation and training to other service providers, the general public, and agency staff. The Commission staff helps coordinate services among other providers such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, offices of the area Agencies on Aging, Independent Living Centers, and the Veterans Administration. Peer support groups are available statewide to provide moral support to newly blinded individuals.

Home Teaching Plus: Designed as a supplement to home teaching, older individuals network with other individuals from across the state, build self-confidence, and develop their skills in a setting away from home during a one-week program. Training during this program is conducted under sleepshades. Sessions include: cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and generally learning a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities (such as shopping, golfing, fishing, and visiting museums) are geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life.

Nebraska Visually Impaired Peer Support (VIPS): This network of support groups across Nebraska offers an environment within which individuals who are visually impaired can meet, learn from each other, and cope more effectively with blindness. At present there are 48 such groups. Local peer groups usually meet monthly at accessible, convenient locations. Transportation is provided when possible.

The Nebraska VIPS is a statewide organization developed by blind persons interested in helping each other while helping themselves.

The goals of VIPS are:

- To create and maintain a network of mutual support and peer counseling groups for persons who experience vision loss.
- To inform and educate blind and visually impaired Nebraskans about available services and resources.
- To educate the public and public officials about the circumstances of aging and blindness.

VIII DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM

Prior to setting up the Deaf-Blind Program, services to deaf-blind consumers in the state had been limited by the constraints of time available to individual staff members who had other duties. During the first year of the Helen Keller grant, the Deaf-Blind Program achieved its purpose of providing full-time services to deaf-blind consumers. This includes services to enable individuals who are deaf-blind to live full and productive lives with dignity and self-respect. More specifically, this program strives to assist individuals who are deaf-blind to achieve full participation within their home communities through awareness, use of the American Sign Language and other alternative forms of communication, and utilization of available resources.

The Deaf-Blind Program works in partnership with Nebraska agencies serving consumers who are deaf-blind as well as staff and consumers of the Commission by providing services to or assisting individuals who are deaf-blind to obtain other services related to all aspects of employment, education, and independent living. The program staff is responsible for planning and scheduling duties in a manner conducive to smooth transition for consumers, as well as efficient use of time and effort.

Program services provide assistance and direction in placement of job seekers who are deaf-blind, consultation to Commission staff and employers regarding reasonable accommodations for individuals who are deaf-blind on the job, and assistance with special arrangements such as support provided by a job coach.

Other services provided include: coordination and facilitation of support groups for consumers who are deaf-blind; demonstration and assessment of the appropriateness of augmentative technology for consumers who are deaf-blind; development of inter-agency agreements or procedures to facilitate the coordination of services to individuals who are deaf-blind; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for the purpose of increasing professional awareness, community awareness, and deaf-blind advocacy; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for interpreters working for and through the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH); and locating resources and materials for Commission staff and other agencies serving or housing consumers who are deaf-blind.

The Deaf-Blind Program will continue to identify and/or develop resources and services that will help eliminate the service gaps to consumers who are deaf-blind.

IX **NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND**

NEWSLINE® for the Blind continues its growth in its third year. NEWSLINE® for the Blind is a computer-based system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access a variety of newspapers and publications by touch-tone telephone. Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses a category of the paper, such as local news, sports, area events, editorial opinions or grocery ads. The listener immediately hears the first story of that category, or can skip to the next story or column, replay it, jump ahead or go back in 10 second increments, raise the volume, or exit the category and choose another by pressing a single digit. Listener options also include the ability to slow down or speed up the rate of speech, a special time check key and a pause control to allow the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, availability to spell a word, go forward or backward paragraphs, go forward or backward sentences, to search for a subject all over the paper by choosing a word. The service is available to 465 users free of charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all 93 counties.

Blind persons preparing for jobs in the year 2002 and beyond cannot afford to ignore the idea of newspaper availability. NEWSLINE® has made it possible for hundreds of blind and print impaired Nebraskans to address this compelling need, thus affording them the opportunity to become even more independent and productive. It is projected that as of the year 2002, NEWSLINE® will have a new speech system based on eloquence sound. This sound system is similar to a human voice and is being used for most blind people in

the country. NEWSLINE® has indeed contributed to a more literate blind population and the ability to better understand and master the printed word through better access to daily newspapers.

NEWSLINE® for the Blind proudly continues to lead the way as it forges ahead in its quest to take its rightful place on the information "super highway." In the same way the Internet has created a global village, NEWSLINE® has opened a whole new world to its users by enabling them to achieve vocational, economic and social equality to help meet the challenges of today and the hopes and dreams of tomorrow.

X REFERRAL SERVICES

Commission Staff provide ongoing referral services to consumers to a variety of services available to them that the agency does not provide in a direct manner. Some of those are:

Radio Talking Book Network (RTBN) is a statewide, closed-circuit radio reading service for those individuals who have disabilities, visual or physical, which prevent them from reading printed material. Special receivers, or televisions with the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) feature, are required to hear the broadcasts of RTBN. Although there are books available for the visually impaired, including the Talking Book Program of the Library of Congress, there is still a daily informational void that visually handicapped people experience. RTBN makes it possible for people to stay in touch with their community and what is going on around them. Our counselors help to fill out applications for RTBN services and teach consumers to use the equipment.

Jobline, which provides dial-up access to America's Job Bank, continues to be available to all job seekers, not just individuals who are blind. Job seekers can access the information on Jobline via a keypad telephone 24 hours a day, all days of the week. Jobline is operating through a cooperative agreement with the Commission, Health and Human Services, and the Department of Labor.

Nebraska Talking Book and Braille Services is the State Library Service for the Blind and reading impaired. Commission personnel assist in filling out applications and teaching consumers how to use the service and the equipment.

Some communities in Nebraska have additional resources available that are important for blind people. Commission personnel in each area are knowledgeable of those resources and inform clients and applicants for services of all relevant information. Examples include transportation programs, reader assistance, and various other community-based programs or services. In most cases, the service provided goes beyond information and referral since Commission staff help individuals to complete application forms and help the individual to access the resource that will help him or her to achieve independence.