

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
PUBLIC MEETING

Omaha, NE

Saturday, February 24, 2007

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions: Barbara Loos, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM and welcomed everyone. Loos read the agenda and reviewed timeframes. Loos stated that the meeting would be recorded and available both by tape and digitally and that a copy of the Public Notice was available on site.

Commissioners Present: Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Darrell Walla, Omaha; Nancy Oltman, Hastings; Bob Burns, Omaha; Bill Orester, Lincoln.

Commission Staff in Attendance from Lincoln: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR Services; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director IL Services; Fatos Floyd, Nebraska Center for the Blind Director; and Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor.

Commission Staff in Attendance from Omaha: Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Robert Newman, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; Nicole Schopen, Voc Rehab Technician; Mitch Green, Voc Rehab Technician; Kelly Coleman, Orientation Counselor.

Commission Staff in Attendance from Norfolk: John Schmitt, Voc Rehab Counselor.

Members of the Public Present: Lauren Pauba, Omaha; Kristal Platt, Omaha; Jim Jirak, Omaha; Karen Anderson, Omaha; Mark Bulger, Omaha; Amy Sweigard, Omaha; Jack Mindrup, Omaha; Jo Genit, Omaha; Brandon Humphrey, Omaha; Zach Hays, Omaha; Tim Steele, Fremont; Don Lilly, Omaha; Jordan McCoy, Omaha; Rachelle Broomfield, Bellevue; Rachna Keshwani, Omaha; Jennifer O'Kell, Omaha; Hubert Paulson, Lincoln; and Clarence Schmitt, Wisner.

Announcement Concerning Public Comments and Tapes of Meetings, Lunch Arrangements and Other Logistics: Loos noted times throughout the agenda for public comments. Flearl announced that a group of blind youth were preparing lasagna, salad and garlic bread for lunch and that rolls, coffee and water were available at the back of the meeting room.

Minutes of the November 18, 2006 Meeting: The Board reviewed the minutes. There were no additions or corrections so Burns moved to approve the minutes and Orester seconded. Loos requested a roll call vote which was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Services for People with Multiple Disabilities, NCBVI: Flearl stated that there were two people scheduled to tell their stories, but one was unable to attend. Amy Sweigard discussed her blindness and diabetes and the training she received at the Nebraska Center for the Blind. She has now returned to school and is taking courses in pre-social work. Flearl said that the other individual who was to speak was a former client who is blind and has a head injury. She stated he attended a training center for individuals with head injuries. Two of NCBVI's counselors helped him to find a job with Raven Labs and worked with him on strategies for tracking his schedule and on travel skills.

She stated that he lost his job once, but his case has been re-opened and he is now attending support groups with community mental health resources, AA meetings and is looking to move to a more positive environment. His previous employer is willing to rehire him if he can resolve his personal issues. There was discussion concerning the fact that if individuals are not eligible for developmental disability services, there is no other funding source for individuals who are mentally ill or have a head injury.

In response to questions about Order of Selection, Van Zandt reported that, at this point, the Commission is able to work with all individuals who are blind and have secondary disabilities and explained that order of selection is based on state agencies' ability to serve all Voc Rehab applicants.

Public Comment: Baby Boomers are aging and budget increases are needed. The Legislative Budget Hearing is scheduled for 1:30 pm, on March 1. Consumers were encouraged to contact their senators and attend the hearing. A question was raised about the availability of transportation. Supported employment was discussed. The need for better communication and sharing of information among consumer groups was raised. The Commission was commended for working with individuals with multiple disabilities and staff was encouraged to serve as consultants to other resources.

Report from the Chairman: Loos stated that she had sent a letter on behalf of the Board to Senator Heidemann, Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, encouraging the committee to consider the budget initiative for older blind Nebraskans proposed by the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN). She participated in the Stakeholders conference call on 1/25/07.

She commented on the correspondence concerning the problems with the Commission Board address, virtual staff suggestion box, and NCBVI listserv, stating that the Board is glad to have these issues resolved. The Board is also glad the Agency synopsis has been completed and that the Scottsbluff office move was successful. The Board appreciated receiving Van Zandt's anniversary letters to staff for this quarter; information from Peery about Hadley School seminars; Center reports, evaluations and client community service project reports; Public Education efforts such as happened with Froggy 98 radio station; the Older Individuals who are Blind Participant Survey; the agency calendar and the annual report to the governor; the joint staff meeting with Iowa that is to be held April 3-5, in Omaha; the invitation to the Board to attend a group teaching for teenagers in Lincoln; the revised Center rules staff updates; information on the AFB Transition Conference and the National Family Conference.

The Board is pleased that interpreters have been lined up for the Deaf-Blind Awareness week proclamation ceremony and is interested in the ongoing efforts to hire an assistant for Nebraska Business Enterprises. The Board has reviewed the correspondence from the Ombudsman's Office and has read the Sowers article which mentioned Joe Buda. In addition, the Board received the request to staff for comments on Rule Chapter 4, Workplace Policies, and will be interested in suggestions generated by this. She also wanted to add the Board's appreciation to that expressed in the commendation letter regarding Dan Hill. The Board was also pleased to hear of Van Zandt's presentation at the Washington Seminar and the upcoming one for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (to the NCSAB). Other correspondence the Board received concerned staff from Missouri coming for training, the Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children, Nebraska Information System (NIS) update, the letter sent to the pool of Impartial Hearing Officers, comments on the proposed plan for changes in the Independent Living (IL) Plan, information on the National Association of Blind Merchants Blindness Leadership and Superior Training (BLAST) Conference, minutes from the Friends of the Commission and information on the upcoming conference on Traumatic

Brain Injury. The Board enjoys receiving the focus topic information ahead of time so it can be better informed and hopes to have the opportunity to interact with new staff and with those coming from other states in the future.

On 2/8/07 Loos participated in a conference call Van Zandt set up in response to the Board's request to seek out interest among State Rehabilitation Council and Commission Board members of agencies for the blind in forming a network. The group scheduled another call for the evening of 3/29/07, after Nebraska's first Monitoring visit from the Rehabilitation services Administration (RSA).

Walla stated that he found the information, articles and real life stories on multiple disabilities very helpful. Walla then asked about the State's weather policy. Van Zandt reported that the policy is set by the Governor and briefly described it.

Public Comment: There were no comments.

Report from the Executive Director:

Van Zandt reported having a busy quarter. She stated that 753 people were served, with 422 served by Voc Rehab and 321 served by Independent Living.

Van Zandt stated that the Center has had some interesting activities, such as one where staff wore sleep shades and prepared breakfast for the clients. She reported that 91.9 % of clients who have attended the Center are employed. Van Zandt reported that on March 31, 2007, a Family Day is planned where family, friends, senators and commissioners are welcome to attend. Van Zandt stated that three new employees have completed their Center training and announced that two were in attendance today and the third is the Staff Assistant in Kearney. We are in the process of hiring for part-time positions in the North Platte office and the Business Enterprise office.

Van Zandt reported that Fred Schroeder has been contracted with to improve and enhance our job placement services. She stated that we have passed the standards and indicators, but have high expectations and want to improve and look at how we can enhance the services we provide. Van Zandt reported that there will be a joint State Staff Meeting with Iowa in Omaha on April 3-5, 2007.

Van Zandt reported that she attended the Legislative activities with both the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN) and the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN). She stated that several staff participated in the VR tech training online program with the Lighthouse for the Blind.

Van Zandt mentioned that during the quarter she has met with many different groups and stated there were too many to list individually.

She has addressed issues from the Ombudsman's Office and has been working to ensure our email is more secure. There was a great deal of Federal reporting this last quarter and everything was completed and sent in on time.

Van Zandt stated that the agency recently learned of the requirement that all employee and contract drivers who drive a state vehicle must take a defensive driving course every 5 years. It's a big project, but everyone will have completed the on-line course by this April.

Van Zandt reported that we are working on revising paperwork on our Individualized Plan for Employment and on the Application for Services.

Van Zandt reported that the Placement Committee is working with Workforce Development on the "Governor's Summit on Employment" conference. She stated this year there will be a focus on blindness with Mike Bullis presenting from an employer perspective as someone who has done extensive work on placement. There will be blind individuals taking part in all aspects of this conference.

Van Zandt reported that we have been reviewing our Rules to see if revisions are needed. The agency also has been working with the Legislature on additional funding for Older Blind Nebraskans.

Van Zandt reported that the Business Enterprise Program made a bid for a location at the library in Grand Island. They only had a 4 day window in which to submit a bid.

Although they met the deadline, they were not successful in obtaining this location. Vendors are continuing to Braille new equipment and to replace worn Braille on vending machines.

Van Zandt reported that there is one Client Assistance Program (CAP) case which will be reviewed later in the meeting.

Van Zandt reported that we are actively working to enhance our hiring process and that Dave Robinson has ideas for this. She stated that he is also researching and working on preparing for emergencies.

Van Zandt reported that RSA-911 first data submission was accepted and commended for superior quality. She stated that our database has been updated to comply with RSA's required tracking and, as of October 1, 2006, Presumption of Eligibility for SSDI is 100% and Presumption of Eligibility for SSI is 100%. Van Zandt stated that we have 60 days to certify or close an individual who has made an application for services and that we do so 100% of the time. We have 90 days to develop an IPE with someone who has been accepted for services and have 95.24% on this requirement. All IL/OIB reports were done and on time.

Van Zandt reported that NCBVI has been working on a grant for the Enrichment Foundation entitled Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha (PILBO) that would be used to purchase equipment. Van Zandt stated that this partnership could be a good ongoing resource for us. We have requested \$30,000, plus 15% for administrative costs. The grant was submitted on 2/1/07 and we should hear by 3/5/07 if approved.

Van Zandt stated that all case reviews were completed except Scottsbluff, which was cancelled due to weather. She also stated that Winnerfest took place in November 2006 and 19 students attended. The next one is scheduled for 3/8:10/07.

Public Comment: Someone asked for the definition of "older blind". Any blind person over 55 years of age is considered older blind. An inquiry was made regarding the percentage statistics of the unemployed. The percentage quoted by Van Zandt was based on the people who attended the Nebraska Center for the Blind and have completed their schooling & training. The Rehab Act accepts both competitive employment and homemaker as employment goals. Our numbers break out to 74% competitively employed and 17% homemakers, with the remaining number being students. Regarding outreach, we have ongoing contacts with employers. An inquiry was made regarding working together on placement with the Chamber of Commerce and State Unemployment Office to educate employers. Counselors work with clients on interviews and their blindness and we work with various committees with Workforce Development Offices statewide. An example was made of the Governor's Summit on Employment in April 2007. Mitch Green was recognized as a new staff member in Omaha who has finished training. He discussed, from his perspective, the importance of blind staff attending Center training.

Old Business:

Budget Update: Van Zandt reported we are in good shape and that staff are conscientious about expenditures and being cost effective. She stated that in the past we had pulled back on staff, cars, and mileage but have added back some staff and travel. We are still funded by Continuing Resolutions at the Federal level, but the money has followed reasonable timeframes, and we hope this trend will continue until the budget is finalized. We have some Social Security reimbursement funds and are spending some to provide training for staff and clients. She reported that Social Security funds are one time and need to be used within two years. She mentioned that we are also considering new workstations for staff as most of the furniture has been around since the 1970's.

She stated that the agency has always put services and technology first, but we are currently looking at the needs in each office for furniture. She stated that the Omaha office was updated several years ago at the expense of the State Office Building, but that was a one-time opportunity. We submitted for Social Security reimbursement for the costs for Center training to clients, in the amount of \$225,000 and are still waiting for approval. Van Zandt reported that the agency has requested General funds for the next biennium period. For 2007-2008, we requested \$851,188 and the Appropriations Committee recommends \$867,334. For 2008-2009, we requested \$919,925 and the Appropriations Committee recommends \$892,927.

Van Zandt reported that the Older Blind initiative proposed by the NFBN is a statewide design and would allow us to enhance what we have with funds of \$1,069,000. She stated that it is an important piece and hopes the state will recognize that current funds are not adequate to meet the needs of older blind Nebraskans.

Website Update: Loos reported that the website update is ongoing and thanked Jirak for his report and ongoing concern and persistence in making sure things are updated and made accessible. Jirak stated that on January 10, 2007, he Van Zandt and Bill Brown had a conference with Nebraska.gov to work out technical aspects to redesign the website. He reported that the templates that had been developed were great but were not user friendly. Jirak also reported that Nebraska.gov sent new templates, but that there have been other issues that have made it difficult to complete the update. Jirak reported that he had a phone conversation with Van Zandt on 2/22/07 in which he regretfully stated he would not be able to continue as our webmaster as he just does not have the time for the redesign. He stated that he will be submitting his resignation and an invoice for the costs associated with his high speed internet service.

Jirak reported that he will work with NCBVI in making this transition and that NCBVI will assist him in converting back to dial-up. Jirak stated that he will email the Board copies of his revised report, his letter of resignation and his request to be reimbursed for internet connection for this past year. Van Zandt acknowledged Jirak's great work and Loos also thanked him for his work and asked for comments about what he had learned to pass on to those who come next. Van Zandt stated that we are working with Nebraska.gov to address accessibility issues and to continue to build the website. She stated that the listserv is to be discussed in the future.

Friends of the Commission Update: Loos reported that the Board had received the minutes from the Friends meeting. There was no further report.

NIS Update: Loos stated that the Board had received a report via e-mail in January. Van Zandt reported that we are working with NIS, technology staff and Freedom Scientific to get everything pieced together.

NFB-Newsline® Update: Loos stated that people who have unlimited long-distance from this area are encouraged to use the toll number 773-299-7122 portal code 632 when calling NFB-Newsline®. The toll-free number, 888-882-1629, is still available. Loos reported the Board's receiving the information on the Kearney Hub. Van Zandt presented statistics for other newspapers, stating that she was worried about having to decide which papers or which part of the state can go online, noting that it is good that the Hub initiated contact on behalf of its subscribers. She stated that NCBVI will have to consider costs, but is looking at committing \$5,000 to the Kearney Hub and looking into funding for other papers. Loos stated that she thought this amount was reasonable.

Orester stated that the same amount of \$5,000 should be given to Radio Talking Book (RTB) and mentioned that its funding was eliminated because of budget cuts. Loos stated that RTB seems to be doing well with its funding. Walla asked if RTB could come and present in the future. Loos stated that, while this could be done, the Board has interacted with RTB at a past meeting.

Status of Braille on and Accessibility of Vending Machines: Loos reported receiving a letter from Howard Simons stating vendors were done with this issue and that the consumers who did some Braille were overwhelmed by the work in Omaha. Loos stated that she has heard from others that there is a lot of support for Braille. She stated that one vendor has been not only working on making sure that his machines are kept Brailled, but also has been working with companies on having machines made accessible. Loos stated that this is an ongoing issue and that we need to continue to encourage those who are making progress with it. Loos asked the Board about responding to Simons's letter. Van Zandt stated that she had attended the Committee of Blind Vendors meeting and, although the committee had expressed that it was not going to continue having this item on its agenda each time, individual vendors were and will continue to be doing labeling on the machines that could be labeled. Van Zandt stated that she thought there was miscommunication and what was reflected in the letter was not what was discussed in the meeting.

Burns stated that Terry Harris should report on the ongoing status of machines being labeled. Walla agreed and stated that, although consumers volunteered to help, this is something the vendors should be doing themselves. Burns stated that he did not think it was unreasonable to expect vendors to Braille their machines wherever possible. Van Zandt stated that, during the Vendors meeting, the Omaha vendor had expressed appreciation for the help and it was a learning process for everyone.

Vendors learned how they could Braille some machines and shared why some machines could not be labeled. Burns stated that the Board should write letters commending those vendors who have put Braille on their machines and stated that he would still request feedback from Harris on the efforts of vendors in the program. The Board concurred and Van Zandt agreed to follow up on it. After discussion, the Board suggested that Loos respond to Simons saying that it would continue to work with vendors concerning machine accessibility.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues: Van Zandt stated that there had been one complaint regarding an individual who felt it was taking too long for scripting at a worksite and that this issue has been resolved.

Public Comment: Nicole Schopen was acknowledged as a new staff person who works in Omaha as a Voc Rehab Technician. She has also completed her training.

Break for Lunch: Clients who provided lunch introduced themselves. They were:

Zach Haye, Rachelle Broomfield, Tim Steele, Brandon Humphrey, Karen Anderson, Jennifer O'Kell, Jordon McCoy, Don Lilly, and Rachna Keshwani.

New Business:

Policy Concerning Weapons: Van Zandt reported that this is a new law and has raised some questions. She was told that a sign would be posted in the Lincoln building that would state that weapons are not permitted there. After further discussion, the Board concluded that it did not need to be involved with this policy, since NCBVI is housed in buildings owned by other entities and owners would most likely handle signage. The Board agreed by consensus that weapons should not be permitted at NCBVI's locations, including student apartments.

Policies Concerning Drivers (response to message from staff virtual suggestion box)

A question was raised via the virtual suggestion box concerning what is expected of both drivers and people who are not employees riding with them. Orestor stated that he was worried about liability for the agency, as the only persons covered are employees and not private citizens. Loos stated that a waiver would cover NCBVI if there were an accident. Van Zandt stated that staff members are aware of these procedures and a waiver is not needed for mentors/mentees, as they are a part of the program. Loos asked at what point a waiver would be signed. Van Zandt stated that the waiver would be signed when needed, as determined by counselor and supervisor. Loos asked the Board for its response to the inquiry. The Board agreed by consensus that, having reviewed the policy, it was satisfied that it speaks to the issue and supervisors need to enforce it. Van Zandt encouraged NCBVI personnel to raise questions with supervisors or the staff person(s) involved if there is a situation they question.

Transportation for the public to attend NCBVI Board meetings: Van Zandt stated that the North Platte office makes calls, sends e-mails and helps with transportation because there is no public transportation. She reported that the Lincoln/Omaha offices do receive occasional calls requesting rides and that staff attending meetings have assisted individuals in the past. She stated that meeting information is sent to the consumer organizations, but that NCBVI has not arranged for transportation statewide. Orester stated that he was concerned about liability. Van Zandt requested direction from the Board. Orester suggested that the liability issue be researched with the Attorney-General's Office. Other discussion concerned logistics. Van Zandt stated that presently Board meetings are considered Commission activities. The Board agreed with this approach.

Policies Concerning Technology Products and Service Delivery: Walla asked who orders equipment as he has had consumers come to him about services being slow and about not having been provided with what they wanted or needed. Van Zandt reported that counselors work with the technical staff and that they together will determine what needs to be ordered, with the bills going through the business office to process payment. Van Zandt stated that anyone can contact either her or any of the local offices with any questions or concerns so issues can be resolved promptly, rather than waiting for the issue to be addressed at a public meeting.

1-25-07 Rehabilitation Services Administration Stakeholders Conference Call: The call included Nebraska entities serving all disabled individuals. Loos stated that the Board received notes on the call from Roseann Ashby of RSA. Loos stated that she commented on the need for more money to serve older blind in Nebraska, the Comprehensive System of Personal Development (CSPD) for salaries, the fact that State Rehabilitation Councils and Commission Boards need ongoing training, the belief among consumers that RSA needs to learn more about what blind consumers

need and want, and the perception that numbers are more important to RSA than programs. Loos stated that Roseann Ashby seemed genuinely interested in knowing what we want.

2-8-07 Support Group for Commission Boards & State Rehabilitation Councils of Agencies for the Blind Conference Call: Loos stated that the states represented on the call were Nebraska, Minnesota, North Carolina, Virginia, South Dakota, and New Hampshire. This group discussed creating a network that can help Boards to stay in touch with one another to address the good and bad happening in each state and allow states to share how they have resolved problems. Among other things, participants discussed the value of the former RSA Regional Offices and the training that State Rehabilitation Councils and Boards had received through them, the hope that face-to-face training can still be possible, and the importance of finding ways to use the materials developed in Kansas City which are available on the RSA website. The group asked Van Zandt to set up another call on March 29 at 7:00 Central Daylight Time.

Legislation: Loos stated that LB300 would create two-year entry-level job opportunities with the State of Nebraska for qualified clients of Voc Rehab, NCBVI and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Van Zandt said that the hearing on 2/14/07 went well. There was testimony from NCBVI, VR and one neutral individual, with no opposition and no further action yet. Burns stated that he commends Senator Howard. Burns made a motion that the Board send a letter to the committee dealing with the bill encouraging its passage and mentioning what a great way this could be to jump start employment for blind and visually impaired Nebraskans. Walla & Orester seconded the motion. Loos asked for a Roll Call and the motion carried unanimously. Burns is to draft a letter and circulate to the Board for revision, approval and mailing.

LB445 is a bill creating official State certification for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the blind. Van Zandt stated that counselors would need to have a BA and agency training (600 hours). She stated that this bill would solidify what the Federal Government requires. Van Zandt reported that she and Serván attended the hearing and Senators were very receptive. Van Zandt stated that Senator Stuthman, introducer of the bill, is open to amendments. Since the language having to do with the Board's approving educational programs and completion of training had not been eliminated (as the Board had requested via between-meeting e-mail correspondence), before introduction of the bill, this will need to be done as an amendment. Another amendment would state that certification would have a reciprocal nature so that existing staff who have a degree and have had 600 hours of training would be certified along with new staff who complete training.

Focus Topics for Next Meetings: June 2, Lincoln, How the Rehab Act Impacts the Blind; August 11, Norfolk, Services to Native Americans; November 17, Lincoln, Partnership Between Educators and Rehab Service Providers.

Public Comment: It was announced that Share a Fare is available in Omaha, Lincoln, and Hastings/Grand Island; with pilot programs in North Platte, Scottsbluff, Beatrice and Norfolk. It was mentioned that it is important to get information about public meetings to people so that they can be responsible in attending. It was suggested that Nebraska NETV broadcast public meetings so people could call in with questions and concerns. Loos stated that the Board can meet via teleconference only 25% of the time but it might be possible to hold a live meeting with individuals then calling in with questions/concerns. Loos stated that NCBVI is working toward making meetings available on the web in real time so people could interact with the Board. Mitch Green offered to research video conferencing.

It was also suggested that NFB-Newsline® be used to make meetings accessible. A comment was made that the State should not provide transportation to meetings in Omaha or Lincoln.

Connie Daly reminded the Board of Commissioners that the Lincoln kids group teaching youth would be building a project and serving lunch on March 3, and Commissioners were invited to attend.

There was discussion concerning the meaning of and requirements for the entry level positions proposed in LB300.

Transportation options for those wishing to attend the budget hearing were discussed.

An attendee requested a letter of recommendation from each Board member for nomination to the Board. Loos informed everyone of the process for becoming a Commissioner.

Final Announcements: Loos thanked everyone who was involved with the Focus Topic, lunch and refreshments. She thanked Hubert Paulson for recording the meeting and Nancy Flearl for taking the minutes.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor

Barbara Loos, Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Serving Clients with Multiple Disabilities

1. In the Field

Many of our clients have at least one secondary disability. This may be a head injury, stroke, multiple sclerosis (MS), mental illness, developmental disability (DD), deaf blindness, physical disability, chemical dependency issues or others.

We work closely with community resources such as MS society, League of Human Dignity, DD services, Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH), Community Mental health services, Quality Living (in Omaha), etc. We work on understanding the secondary disability, address barriers to individual success and tap into the knowledge and experience of these resources to aid us in serving our clients. We build in to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) what accommodations we need to make.

Cheryl Poff is an excellent resource to us with her many years of working with the League and Centers for Independent Living.

We also network with Assistive Technology Program for resources for assistive technology to best serve clients as well as General Voc Rehab. It is all about not reinventing the wheel.

For individuals with mental illness, we require a meeting with doctor, therapist, and working with Community Alliance. They have an employment specialist that we have worked closely with in placing individuals in the past. With regard to individuals with chemical dependency, we require counseling and attending Alcoholics Anonymous

(AA) meetings. We introduce them to others we have worked with successfully that are blind, have similar issues and have been able to work through the problem. Past clients have accompanied individuals to AA meetings to be of support, which is good mentoring on many levels!

Overall, individualized approaches are crucial, because each case is so different.

2. In the Center

Here are some case examples of Center clients who experienced disabilities in addition to blindness, with a brief description of the problem areas and strategies that were used to provide quality training. The names and some identifying characteristics have been changed.

Monique

Monique is a 25-year-old female with retinitis pigmentosa (R.P.). At age seven she had a stroke that left her paralyzed on the right side. Monique did have some occupational training but this was very limited. She has problems with directions. Monique also has difficulty walking on rough terrain.

Because she did not have the use of her right hand, several simple adaptations were employed, including a one handed keyboard to use the computer. The proper keyboard was determined through an evaluation conducted by the Accommodation Resource Center, at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Since she could not manipulate the slate and stylus, the Braille'n Speak was set to the one handed mode.

In the kitchen and at the apartments, some simple devices were created to hold cans in place so they could be opened with a one handed can opener, and a cutting board was modified to allow her to cut items with a knife. We purchased a pan stabilizer to use on the stovetop to keep her pan in place while cooking. We also purchased a pan with a locking lid. The pan had holes along the top so hot liquids could be strained. The Home Management Instructor designed an apron with large pockets so she could carry items from the refrigerator and cupboard with ease. Because her sense of direction and overall orientation was significantly limited, travel focused on effective use of the cane, walking with other people, appropriate methods for soliciting assistance, and gaining experience with a broad range of different types of environments. In wood shop, clamps and jigs were used to a much greater extent, and tools that could be safely used with one hand were the primary focus of training. She was provided with vocational counseling, with the opportunity to explore her interests. This was critical, since she did not have a clear understanding of the type of duties her choice of vocation would require of her. Individual counseling was also critical, not only with her, but also with her family, since their expectations were based on incomplete information and hope, rather than a complete understanding of her true level of ability. Following training, Monique and her family moved out of state, and at last report she was attending school and applying for a guide dog.

Mike

Mike is a 48-year-old male who suffers from anxiety and major depression. He is currently on medication to control his mental illness. Mike suddenly went blind after a car accident two years ago. He has difficulty in large group situations and exhibits paranoia when attempting independent travel routes. Mike becomes easily frustrated and angry and routinely leaves Center Training early for the day.

Since this client needed to be able to effectively manage his mental illness in order to successfully benefit from center training, he was assisted with arranging for counseling and Psychiatric care through external community resources. This included attending an anger management group, and being assisted by center staff to plan effective methods for coping with group activities. He was referred to a biofeedback clinic to learn ways to reduce his stress. With regard to travel, greater instructor involvement was provided, the length of travel routes was initially reduced, and then gradually increased, and medication to help with his paranoia was obtained through his Psychiatric care giver. Mike was given the opportunity to discuss his frustration and anger whenever he felt like leaving early, and to help reinforce the need for him to complete full days of training, a contract was established, so that he would know clearly the conditions under which he could remain in center training. It was agreed that he would verbally confirm that he had taken his medications appropriately, and he was encouraged to join a support group related to dealing effectively with blindness. Following training, Mike became involved with home sales.

Anita

Anita is a 31-year-old female with juvenile onset diabetes. Her blood sugars range daily from 30-485. She has Diabetic Retinopathy. Anita chooses not to bring her diabetic monitoring equipment. She routinely forgets to have supplies on hand to treat a low blood sugar. She has neuropathy, which makes Braille hard to read. Ulcerations on her toes make travel difficult.

Since she had not been taking responsibility to bring her glucose monitor and other diabetic supplies, in spite of having experienced repeated low blood sugars, a training contract was written.

This contract made the continuation of her center training contingent upon her bringing the proper equipment and supplies with her each day, and attending diabetic seminars with the Diabetic Alternatives counselor on a regular basis. In addition, she was shown the location of the diabetic kits in each of the classrooms, provided with a fanny pack, in which she was required to carry diabetic supplies during training, monitored for the times of day when low blood sugars were occurring most frequently and having her class schedule adjusted accordingly, and having instructors watch for her to go into low blood sugars, so that they could assist her in these situations. A wheelchair was utilized part of the time in travel classes, to reduce the pressure on her feet. We did utilize alternative transportation methods when needed, like for traveling to the grocery store. She is using both plastic paper and Dymo tape in Braille class, and the Braille'n Speak, for taking notes. She became a homemaker following training.

Clarence

Clarence is a 55-year-old alcoholic who uses drugs occasionally. He shows up late for classes. On several occasions, Clarence did not have money for scheduled activities. Clarence has a very poor diet that affects his energy level. Clarence has no intention of giving up alcohol. He does not think he has a problem.

In order to help this client to appropriately control his alcohol and drug problems, arrangements were made for him to meet a recovering alcoholic, and through a buddy system begin attending AA meetings. In addition, a client behavior contract was established, requiring him to attend these AA meetings, and to make up time for his absenteeism related to his use of alcoholism and poor diet. In addition, he was referred for counseling to help resolve the emotional problems related to his inappropriate behaviors.

Also, budgeting and meal planning skills were reinforced both in the center and at the apartments. He was required to complete the activities that he missed due to not having the necessary funds. Following training, he became a telemarketer.

Patrick

Patrick has advanced Multiple Sclerosis. He does use an electric wheelchair. Patrick becomes extremely fatigued rapidly. His fine motor skills are affected.

Initially, we worked with Patrick using manual wheelchair; however it soon became apparent that he did not have the strength and fine motor control to use a cane in conjunction with the wheelchair. A needs assessment was arranged through Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, to determine the best form of wheelchair for him. An electric wheelchair was obtained through Medicare. He was fitted with a somewhat longer cane, but because his reaction time and orientation were negatively impacted due to his MS, non-visual travel was very challenging for him. He could not use the slate and stylus, and his ability to read Braille was variable due to tactile loss related to his MS. Therefore, the Braille'n Speak was introduced, and this was reasonably successful. Some adaptations were introduced for Patrick in both shop and in Home Management, although his performance in each of these areas was slower than might have been expected, especially since he had worked as a short order cook prior to the onset of his MS. A plastic basket was designed to help Patrick transport items using his wheelchair. Many adjustment issues were apparent, and he was assisted in joining a support group for persons with MS. Following training, Patrick began classes at the community college.

Joyce

Joyce is deaf-blind. She has no hearing in the right ear and 30% in the left ear. She cannot directionalize sound. She can hear verbal conversation with no background noise. Joyce can communicate verbally. She knows sign language, but prefers not to use it. Joyce is not able to understand synthesized speech.

Since this client could not understand synthesized speech, a refreshable Braille display was used in computer classes, and a Braille Lite was used once a note taker was introduced in the Braille class. She did not know Braille, but was given additional training time right away to learn non-contracted Braille, which she then used on the Braille display.

She was connected with the state Deaf/Blind Coordinator, and encouraged to begin using American Sign Language in all of her classes. An interpreter was employed for seminars, and in other situations where clear communication was necessary. In travel, the Braille compass was introduced, along with "cue cards" to facilitate communication with the general public. These cards had both print and Braille information, so that it would be easier for the public to recognize what questions Joyce was asking, and so that she could receive clear answers in return. Other than the use of some Sign language in shop and home management classes, there were few modifications to these classes. Joyce had some emotional difficulties, since she found it hard to understand what people were saying, which tended to lead her to conclude that they were making fun of her, or trying to cause her problems, and some counseling and medication to address these emotional issues were obtained through external community resources. Joyce began working in a manufacturing plant after completing center training.

3. In Placement

Clients with multiple disabilities do enter a wide range of employment settings, depending upon their unique characteristics and goals. They may need additional technology or other strategies that relate to multiple barriers. The kind of networking with resources mentioned in both sections above, and of course with potential employers, can facilitate achievement of high-quality employment outcomes.

For some, there is a need for job coaching or other types of supports to make employment feasible. The following information is about Supported Employment, which is specific to this latter type of person.

Supported Employment

Information Sheet

The term "supported employment" means competitive work in integrated work settings for individuals with the most significant disabilities for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred; or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability; and who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive and ongoing support on the job, usually in the form of a job coach. Frequently such individuals do have multiple disabilities. Currently (February 2007), there are 18 clients being served with Supported Employment funds.

At present, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) receives \$30,000 annually for supported employment services through Title VI Part B of the Rehabilitation Act. Federal regulations require that the following criteria be met before these funds can be used for the purpose of supported employment:

1. The individual is to be placed on a job based in the community. The Rehab Act does not require the placement involve a minimum number of hours below which Title VI Part B funds cannot be used, although some agencies do. Also, an individual must be paid no less than minimum wage or that the expectation exists that the individual will eventually earn minimum wage in the near foreseeable future.
2. Placement in an integrated work setting. "Integrated" refers to the opportunity for interaction between the supported employee and the non-disabled work force around him or her with access to the same facilities as the non-disabled work force.
3. The need for on-going support is expected to continue after funding from NCBVI is terminated. Federal regulations restrict Title VI Part B funds to a period of time not to exceed 18 months after a community-based placement has been made. It is necessary, therefore, that a source of funding for ongoing support be identified before an individual is accepted for supported employment. For those who have developmental disabilities, the Developmental Disabilities System (DDS) will most likely be the source for ongoing funding.

In some cases, NCBVI funding for supported employment services on behalf of an individual may be extended longer than 18 months if there is reason to believe that a source of long range funding will eventually pick up the cost of support allowing the discontinuation of NCBVI funding. This situation occasionally happens when supported employment worksites are set up for individuals between the ages of 18 and 21. DDS does not pick up the cost of supported employment services until individuals have reached the age of 22. In such cases, NCBVI will extend services for longer than 18 months until the age of 22 is reached.

It should be noted that NCBVI funding for supported employment is seldom used to support a case for the full 18 months as limited by federal regulations.

Responsibility for funding ongoing support is generally transferred from NCBVI to DDS when the supported employee's need for support has been reduced to minimal levels. The length of funding from NCBVI will therefore depend on how rapidly the individual's need can be stabilized. If the need for support is reduced to a minimum level in 3 months, that is the point at which responsibility for funding should be transferred.

For individuals with disabilities such as head injury or mental illness who might benefit from supported employment services, on-going funding is not available. This is one area where some may fall through the cracks. Once a candidate for supported employment has been identified, contractual arrangements between NCBVI and a local provider of supported employment services are established. In the Lincoln area, examples of supported employment service providers include ServiceLinc, Vital, and Community Alternatives of Nebraska. The contract reflects NCBVI funding for job development, placement services, and on-going support from a job coach.

There may be instances in which support is only needed for a short time. Let's say that support from a job coach is terminated after 6 months. Such a case is not considered a supported employment case and Title VI Part B funds should not be expended. Of course, whether or not extinction of support can be realized cannot always be anticipated and that's fine. The money has already been spent. If you have a pretty good idea, however, that a person's need for a job coach may be fairly temporary, funds from general case services should be used (plan type: 4955) instead of Title VI Part B funds. In such a case, services from a local supported employment service provider can still be contracted.

Beyond funding for supported employment services, NCBVI is a resource for in-service training regarding the alternative techniques of blindness. NCBVI staff can also assist local service providers in the development of strategies for resolving difficulties that might arise in the work place due to blindness.