

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
PUBLIC MEETING

Saturday, June 2, 2007

Lincoln, Nebraska

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions: Barbara Loos, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and thanked everyone for coming. Loos went over the agenda items and introductions were made.

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

Commission Staff in Attendance: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Val Peery, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director, Lincoln; Fatos Floyd, Nebraska Center for the Blind Supervisor, Lincoln; and Jamie Forbis, Orientation Counselor, North Platte.

Members of the Public Present: Hubert Paulson, Lincoln; Brad Loos, Lincoln; and Dan Bird, Omaha.

Announcement Concerning Public Comments and Meeting Recordings, Lunch Arrangements and Other Logistics:

Loos stated that meetings are now recorded digitally, no longer taped, and individuals can request a copy through the Commission. Peery informed everyone of the lunch arrangements.

Executive Director's Evaluation: Loos reported that, in the past, the Board conducted the Executive Director's evaluation by teleconference but that the Public Meeting Law has changed. Loos stated that the Public Meeting Law will now be available for viewing at every meeting in both print and Braille. Loos stated that the Executive Director's evaluation needs to be conducted during a public meeting and explained the steps to be followed in order to be in compliance. Loos stated that the Executive Director's evaluation is based on five duties and responsibilities. The Board discussed each category separately. The ratings were on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Believing that it is respectable to be blind - It was the Board's consensus that the rating be 5.0

Listening and responding to concerns from staff and consumers alike - It was the Board's consensus that the rating be 4.2

Identifying priorities and seeing them through - It was the Board's consensus that the rating be 4.1

Negotiating creatively to hire quality staff and fund exemplary service delivery - It was the Board's consensus that the rating be 4.1

Dreaming progressive steps toward true equality for the blind - It was the Board's consensus that the rating be 4.2.

Loos stated that for the 2006-2007 year, Van Zandt has kept the Board apprised, has focused her efforts on improvements for the standards and indicators, improved protocol for working with blind children, provided staff training for better employment outcomes, fully implemented the technology grants to a wider range of consumers, educated Senators about the importance of the Commission's work and monitored the expenditures and fund balances within the budget, so felt goals and objectives were fully met. Loos asked if these remarks should be included as part of the Executive Director's evaluation. It was the Board's consensus that the remarks be included.

Loos read a composite of comments that were received from staff and asked if the Board wanted them included with the evaluation. The Board agreed that the comments should be included.

Burns suggested that next year's staff survey should include a few more open-ended questions, since not all surveys included comments. Loos stated that she would add this item to the August Agenda. Walla stated that he would like to revisit the question of the Board being accessible to staff. Oltman made a motion to accept Van Zandt's evaluation and retain her as Executive Director for another one-year term. Orestor and Walla both seconded the motion. Loos requested a roll call vote which was unanimous in favor of the motion. Orestor made a motion that, due to Van Zandt's evaluation being above satisfactory, her salary be increased by 4%, effective July 1, 2007. Burns seconded the motion. Loos requested a roll call vote which was unanimous in favor of the motion. Loos stated that last year Van Zandt's average was 4.24% and this year was 4.31 percent. Loos welcomed Van Zandt back for the 2008 fiscal year.

Van Zandt thanked the Board for its support and the opportunity to serve another year. Van Zandt asked if the staff survey results would be sent to staff. Oltman stated that she would forward them to Loos and Loos stated that she would send to Van Zandt to disseminate. Loos stated that she would contact Van Zandt regarding scheduling a time to discuss staff comments.

Minutes of the February 24, 2007 Meeting: Loos stated that the Board had received, via email, a correction concerning the webmaster's report. Burns also requested the minutes be changed to "commending" vendors for doing a good job regarding Braille on vending machines. Burns made a motion that these two corrections be made and Walla seconded the motion. Loos requested a roll call vote which was unanimous in favor of the motion. Orester made a motion to approve the minutes and Burns seconded the motion. Loos requested a roll call vote which again was unanimous in favor of the motion.

The Board took a ten-minute break.

Focus Topic: How the Rehab Act Impacts the Blind, NCBVI: Prior to the Board meeting, Bob Deaton had sent an outline of the Rehab Act for the Commissioners to review. At the meeting, Deaton distributed Braille copies of the Act outline and gave a general overview of the Act and explained what could be found in its different titles and sections. Deaton stated that the Act has seven titles and numerous sections. He reported that Title I, (Voc Rehab Services) VI (Supported Employment) and VII (Independent Living Services) are the ones that mainly apply to the Commission and explained their relevance. He also explained some missing sections. Deaton stated that there is a reauthorization bill but that it has not yet passed.

Loos informed Deaton that she appreciated the overview and outline. She stated that the information was very helpful and would like the Rehab Act outline included in new Commissioners' packet with a note stating that one section is no longer funded and thus no longer applicable. Van Zandt stated that the Act's outline will be updated and a complete version will be included in the new Commissioners' packet. Deaton stated that he would revise the outline. Loos thanked him for his efforts.

Public Comment: A question was raised concerning receipt of staff surveys via the virtual suggestion box. Loos said she had received none. She was pleased that Robinson had copied the Board on the message he had sent with instructions to staff on how to use the box, since that meant no one had to look up that information in order to respond that way. She had, however, received none either via that route or through the regular mail. If the box isn't working, that is a real concern. Van Zandt said she would contact the website individuals to report the virtual suggestion box's not working and also check to see if the "misplaced" surveys could be retrieved and sent.

Report from the Chairman: Loos reported that she testified at the budget hearing on March 20th. On March 22, she was unable to attend the conference call with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), but stated that Oltman participated. She and Oltman attended the conference call with the Commission Boards and the State Rehab Council network on April 16th. Loos reported that she was unable to attend Friends & Family Day on March 30th as she was attending a mentoring activity in Aurora, but heard it went well. She and Walla participated in the initial session of the Joint State Staff Meeting with the Commission and the Iowa Department for the Blind. On May 8th, she attended a meeting in Omaha with Dr. Elton Moore, who is facilitating our Statewide Needs Assessment. Orestor and Oltman attended by conference call. On May 22nd, Loos attended a seminar with Commission students and students from the Iowa Dept for the

Blind and later that day had a discussion with Jan Stokebrand with Oltman participating by conference call. On June 1st, she met with Jamie Forbis with Oltman again participating by conference call. Loos reported that she was unable to participate in the Nebraska Center for the Blind Alumni Association's bake sale on May 24th. She stated that it was good to have the web site's new look "launched" on March 12th. She hopes the revised text in the Commission Board's box will inspire people to seek the Board out.

Loos stated that the Board is pleased that the certification legislation passed. She reported that she wrote, on behalf of the Board, a response to Howard Simons concerning labels on vending machines. Loos stated that the Board appreciated receiving anniversary letters for John Schmitt, Cheryl Livingston, Larry Mackey, Cindy Zimmer, Josie Rodriguez, Sherrie Bruegman, Bob Deaton, Larry Roos, Deanna Jesse and Val Peery. The Board also appreciates receiving the calendar updates and staff listings. Loos welcomed Jamie Forbis to the meeting as a new staff member and stated that she hoped Jan Stokebrand and Eric Sandberg could attend future meetings. She stated that she hoped Jeremy Richey and Mitch Green were doing well and hoped Sahar Hussein's situation would be resolved favorably. She stated that Board had received the financial information from Bill Brown, data tracking from Dottie Wilmott, Center reports and project reports, and the commendation letter regarding Cheryl Poff, Nancy Flearl and Elaine Kavulak. Loos stated that she was proud of the Center staff and students when she attended the RSA meeting on May 22nd. She thought that there was good interaction and the students did a great job of helping people understand the purpose of training and the importance of attitudes. Loos stated that the Board also appreciated receiving the thank you letter from the individual who attended the Governor's Workforce Summit, the memorial thank you letters, and the minutes from Friends. She also stated that she plans to attend the Helen Keller Deaf-Blind ceremony, if possible.

Public Comment: No comments.

Report from the Executive Director: Van Zandt stated that field services served 915 people with 476 in Voc Rehab and 26 successful closures and 40 unsuccessful closures since October 1. She reported that staff are conducting checks with long-term clients and closing if no interest or action has been taken recently. She stated that discussions in districts show many more are likely to be closed successfully by September 30th. Van Zandt reported that Independent Living served 439 since October 1st with 93 successful closures and 13 unsuccessful closures. She stated that the Center clients have been active in preparing and serving meals at the transition protocol meetings and RSA meetings which were important in improving their skills and confidence, as well as helping to educate those being served. She stated that clients attended the budget hearing and had an eating activity at the State Capitol cafeteria. She reported that the Center's Family and Friends Day was a big success. She stated that clients attended a meeting with StarTran, participated in the bake sale, food drive, a pot luck and spent a day with Iowa clients and helped them tour the Center. Van Zandt reported that a two-day camping trip is planned for June. She reported that 148 full-time clients have been served since 1996, with 85 achieving competitive employment. She stated that 92% of clients who completed training are employed (including competitive employment and homemakers), 23% are still students and only 6% are not working or in school.

Van Zandt stated that there have been many staff changes. She reported that Jamie Forbis, Orientation Counselor, who will be working in North Platte after completion of her Center training, started March 26; Jan Stokebrand, with the Business Enterprise Office, started May 21 and Eric Sandberg, Apartment Resource Aide in the Center, started on May 29th. She further stated that Jeremy Richey left on March 31, Sahar Husseini on April 12 and Mitch Green on April 24.

Van Zandt stated that we are in the process of creating two new positions- a Program Specialist for Older Blind Services and a Braille Instructor for the Center.

Van Zandt reported that 24 teenagers attended Winnerfest and Peer Support Leadership training was provided in Scottsbluff, North Platte and Kearney. She stated that the Mentoring Program held a statewide activity in March. Van Zandt also reported that the Placement Committee and local offices worked together getting clients and staff members to have a very active role at the Governor's Summit helping with registrations, workshop demonstrations and being exhibit guides, which made a strong presence to demonstrate the capabilities of blind people to employers.

Van Zandt reported that Dr. Fred Schroeder had consulted with administrators and supervisors to help increase the focus on high quality and full-time employment outcomes for clients. She stated that he will be returning on June 5-8 to work with field staff. She reported that Serván and Deaton are also attending office staff meetings to better communicate with field staff and to help guide staff to achieve the goals set out in the State Plan.

Van Zandt stated that the new law regarding certification for Voc Rehab counselors passed. She recognized Serván for all his work in this endeavor. Van Zandt stated that Work & Gain Experience in the Summer (WAGES) arrangements are nearly completed with funding set up and temporary staff hired. It will begin June 17th and run through July 28th.

Van Zandt reported that we have a new brochure for employers on the value of employing blind job candidates and mentioned that the brochure and employer testimonials are on the website.

Van Zandt reported that Terry Harris continues to have Braille labels made and distributed. She stated that there are some new cold food machines which will provide better service and decrease costs. She also stated that Nebraska Business Enterprises has a new small contract for pop machines in the City County building in Grand Island. Van Zandt reported that one rest area on I-80 was closed permanently and that equipment was moved to the Platte River rest area. She stated that part of Don Ward's area was remodeled for office space for Jan Stokebrand. Van Zandt stated that the Committee of Blind Vendors held elections on May 18th and Howard Simons continues as committee chair. She stated that there is one new vendor at the North Platte rest area, Mike Holscher, who is doing an excellent job.

Van Zandt reported that all staff has completed the on-line defensive driving course, which each person must renew every five years. She stated that we are continuing to work on ordering new workstations for staff in addition to looking for furniture for the apartments and a refrigerator for the kitchen in Omaha. She reported that the Lincoln office has a new fax and copier machine that saves as electronic files that can be emailed to recipients.

Van Zandt reported that contracts have been set up to continue NFB-Newsline® and for the Needs Assessment project with Mississippi State University. She is continuing to work with Building Division to explore other possible locations for Lincoln's office space, but has not found anything yet. All office and apartment leases are being renewed.

Public Comment: The Board was informed that the new fax machine prevents unsolicited faxes.

## Old Business:

Budget Update: Van Zandt reported that this budget proposal term went very well and all timelines were met. She stated that NCBVI had requested \$867,334 of state funds for 2008 fiscal year and was appropriated that exact amount plus \$75,000 for the Older Blind project. For 2009, NCBVI requested 892,927 and was funded that amount plus the \$75,000. She acknowledged the work of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN), staff and consumers on educating Senators regarding the older blind project for the full appropriated request. Van Zandt stated that NCBVI had also asked for additional ability for PSL (amount allowed to spend on salaries) in order to have enough to arrange for additional salaries and that was increased as well. Van Zandt reported that expenditures on case services were up this past quarter. NCBVI has submitted Social Security reimbursements, but has not received money or approval of funding. She stated that the request for the older blind project was over a million dollars but it was funded at \$75,000. Senators said that the committee wanted us to do some needs assessment and to look at statewide needs of the older blind. If we do a good job this first year, she believes chances are quite positive for future funding. Van Zandt reported that the trust fund balance is approximately \$162,000- \$165,000 and stated that expenses for mentoring are out of this trust fund as are client supplies. She reported the balance of the K.D. Robinson fund at \$58,000 and stated that the cash fund includes \$40,000 for PILBO, (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha) a new grant from the Enrichment Foundation for older blind people in Omaha. There is also approximately \$40,000 in the Business Enterprise fund.

The Board took a half-hour break for lunch and reconvened at 12:55 pm.

Website Update: Van Zandt stated that she sent out only one month of activity, but didn't get the entire quarter's activity sent. She asked Commissioners what they would like to receive in the future. Loos stated that she found the information interesting, but did not know if all the information was needed. Burns suggested that the information be downloaded monthly and attached to minutes each quarter. Van Zandt stated that each month is a separate link, but she would send the information to the Commissioners monthly. Van Zandt also stated that she and Peery would review monthly data and discuss the main points and how data could be compiled into a quarterly report. Burns stated that if this process was difficult, to just send the information to the listserv each month. It was decided that this issue would be discussed further at the August 11th Board meeting.

Friends of the Commission Update: Loos stated that there was nothing new to report other than the Board's having received their minutes. Van Zandt stated that they are still working on a system for automatic donations and are seeking an individual who would operate the software to process transactions.

NIS Update: Van Zandt stated that there have been some meetings on various aspects, but did not have anything specific to report.

NFB-Newsline® Update: Loos reported that she had requested that Ryan Osentowski update, from draft form, the Board's mission statement and job duties. This has been done. Van Zandt reported that she had sent a letter to the contact person at the Kearney HUB, but had not yet received a reply. She had hoped our offer would inspire a response, but since it hadn't, she would try calling him.

Status of Braille on and Accessibility of Vending Machines: The Board discussed writing letters to vendors. Burns stated that the Board appreciates vendors who utilize Braille and would like vendors to know that Commissioners appreciate their efforts. Van Zandt stated that she had spoken with Terry Harris after their last meeting and he informed her that vendors are Braille machines and they know it is an expectation now. This being the case, the Board decided not to create a mechanism for determining to whom letters of commendation would be sent.

Burns asked for assurance that, if a new technique or idea were discovered, this be shared with all other vendors. Van Zandt stated that she would speak to Harris and ask him to inform all vendors of any innovations he or other vendors discover.

The Board discussed whether this item should remain on future agendas. The consensus was to remove it until this item becomes a focus topic again.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues: There were no complaints or issues this past quarter.

Public Comment: An individual commented that, although Braille labels are important, being able to access items in a machine with a flat panel can be an even more frustrating thing. Accessibility of vending machines goes beyond Braille labeling.

## New Business:

State Plan: Van Zandt asked if the Board had received the draft attachments and pre-print that she had sent and inquired if anyone wanted any revisions. The RSA people provided valuable assistance and were helpful in bringing things into focus that were very positive. Their comments regarding goals and strategies to increase the number of people getting full-time jobs were beneficial and they now have more measurable objectives and are better able to define "full-time". They looked at data, talked with consumers and staff during their May visit, did a case service review and made suggestions for helping counselors get a handle on where they should be going. Van Zandt reported that the RSA team is working with us to fine tune things and, although they will not return in person for three years, they will continue with their support. The State Plan must be submitted to RSA by July 1st and she needed the Board's approval prior to submitting. Burns made a motion to approve the State Plan as written. Walla seconded the motion. Loos requested a roll call vote which was unanimous in favor of the motion.

State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL): Van Zandt stated that she had emailed the SPIL to the Board. It had to be written and agreed upon by three entities--the Commission, SILC (Statewide Independent Living Council) and the RSA. It was a difficult process. Van Zandt stated that SILC meetings are public and asked Deaton to routinely send the Board notices of its meeting dates and minutes. Deaton mentioned upcoming vacancies in SILC. He said that the Governor does not make appointments. Individuals apply and the Council makes recommendations which are approved by the State Board of Education. Meetings are normally held in Lincoln.

The Board took a ten-minute break.

Statewide Needs Assessment: Van Zandt stated that the surveys have been finalized and thanked everyone for their assistance. Van Zandt stated that Dottie Wilmott compiled the information and sent Mississippi State (MSU) the names of staff and clients for each group that will be called or will receive the surveys. Van Zandt reported that, as soon as MSU receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, they will begin the interviews. She stated that MSU will run the statistics, give us the data, compile recommendations and provide us a summary. The cost will be \$28,000-\$29,000.

RSA Monitoring Review: Van Zandt stated that she had nothing further to add on this item.

eFORCE New Data System: Van Zandt reported that this is the electronic system from Iowa and it is an excellent system, very accessible and a good way to move forward with electronic files. She further stated that having a paperless tracking system had been one of her goals. There have been numerous meetings with different levels of staff and feedback has been excellent. She said that everyone feels it is user friendly and very helpful. There will be both setup and ongoing costs and NCBVI is looking at the impact on operations and the budget before a decision is made, but it looks very promising. The goal is to have the system operational by the first of the next Federal fiscal year, October 1st. Van Zandt stated how truly grateful she was to Allen Harris (Director of Iowa Dept. for the Blind) and his staff for supporting this communication and working with us on this whole process.

Legislation: Loos stated that LB445's passing had been discussed earlier. Van Zandt reported that this law is a fine accomplishment and it is exciting to have it in place. It has been approved by the RSA.

She stated that supervisors and deputy directors are looking at fine tuning the procedures for implementing the new law. The 600 hours (the length of training) is longer than previously required so they will be discussing a combination of Center training and beyond. She will continue sending drafts and keeping the Board informed.

LB300 Work Incentive: Van Zandt reported that Amy Buresh attended the hearing. The bill wasn't killed, but it never moved out of committee. It may possibly be brought up again next year.

Goals for the NCBVI Executive Director State Fiscal Year 2008, Pearl Van Zandt, PhD: Loos stated that the Board had received Van Zandt's goals and, although they have formerly been discussed during the August Board Meeting, she felt it made sense to have goals for the next year discussed before the year actually begins. Van Zandt agreed that having the goals at this meeting made sense, although she stated that it would be helpful prior to setting goals to have the results of the staff survey. Van Zandt discussed process involved in creating the two new positions. She stated that the program specialist position would still be needed, even if additional funding was not received. Van Zandt and Deaton then outlined some of the duties this person would be performing.

Staff Survey Results: Burns stated that the survey results should not be sent out to staff until the Board finds out the status of the virtual suggestion box and whether or not the missing surveys can still be retrieved. Loos stated that she would not send any survey results until the Board receives a definite answer regarding the link and would wait to schedule a meeting with Van Zandt until the Board had received all surveys. Van Zandt again stated that she would contact the website personnel to report the suggestion box's not working and to inquire as to retrieving the missing surveys, and then pass on her findings to the Board.

Loos stated that the Board would communicate through email regarding changes in the format of the staff survey and discuss possibilities at the next meeting.

Focus Topics for Next Meetings: August 11, Norfolk, Services to Native Americans; November 17, Lincoln, Partnership Between Educators and Rehab Service Providers.

Public Comment: There was discussion concerning the logistics for the Norfolk meeting in August. Peery is to make arrangements and notify the Board. Loos stated that, during one of the Board's meetings with new staff, a suggestion was made that the Board tour NCBVI offices when meetings were held in different locations. A tour of the Norfolk facility was scheduled by the Board for 4:00 PM on Friday, August 10th.

The White Cane Banquet is scheduled for November 10th with Fatos Floyd as guest speaker. The Omaha Public Schools have an opening for a teacher for the blind. The SRC Commission Board Networking Group has a teleconference scheduled for Monday evening, June 4th.

Final Announcements: Loos thanked everyone for coming, Peery for making the lunch arrangements and Paulson for recording the meeting.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 3:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Val Peery, Administrative Assistant

Barbara Loos, Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

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