

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2007

I INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (The Commission) is the State rehabilitation agency and our mission is “Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities and building belief in the blind”. Our agency provides a variety of comprehensive services enabling blind people to become fully participating, contributing members of society. Blind people lead normal lives, work in a wide range of jobs, have families, raise children, and participate in community activities. However, the real challenge is to change society misconceptions about the capability of the blind. The Commission works on this by providing comprehensive training to our consumers about their own potentials, and also by educating the general public about the ability of the blind to be fully integrated into the social and economic mainstream. The following programs and services provide the means by which blind persons can regain or retain a productive role in society:

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

The Commission utilizes three types of surveys to quantify client satisfaction and to seek input for improvement. These surveys are completed at different times. The Rehabilitation Track Survey and the Independent Living Survey are completed at least six months after case closure. In order to get a better feedback from our VR clients, a more comprehensive survey instrument is conducted over the phone. In addition, the Commission contracted with the Mississippi State University to survey both former and current VR clients to assess the needs of blind persons in Nebraska. The Orientation Center Survey is conducted also over the phone, three months after training is completed. A Commission team has been working on formulating new surveys to replace the current ones. These new surveys are being designed to provide us with better feedback and they will start being utilized in February 2008. Another form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, which are held four times a year with the Board and also at State conventions of consumer organizations.

The NFB Mentoring program grant ended its third year. The Enrichment Foundation grant provided assistance to transition age clients; and the new grant which started in October 2006 will help the older blind in the Omaha area. During our seventh Federal Fiscal Year, the Commission was able to obtain its full federal-funding match. We also received reallotment

funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the General Rehab agency in Nebraska transferred some funds to help the Commission implement a new data system.

II FINANCIAL REPORT

1.	Basic Support:		
A.	Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	2,736,743
B.	Aid	\$	594,406
2.	Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program		
A.	Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	231,974
B.	Aid	\$	19,603
3.	Supported Employment		
A.	Operations	\$	0
B.	Aid	\$	1,841
4.	Independent Living Part B		
A.	Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	27,811
B.	Aid	\$	19,840
5.	In-Service Training Quality Grant		
A.	Operations (only)	\$	43,376
6.	Social Security Reimbursement		
A.	Operations	\$	122,903
B.	Aid	\$	2,615
	Non Grant Expenditures	\$	9,483

III VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

The Vocational Rehabilitation program has a goal of assisting blind individuals in becoming fully integrated, productive members of society. In rehabilitating such individuals, the Commission provides training and placement in quality 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, blindness information to family and friends, vocational education, counseling and guidance, job training, job development, job placement and assistive technology services. During fiscal year 2006/2007, 550 Nebraskans received services in all statuses; of which 59 consumers were competitively employed in a variety of jobs. Four individuals were successfully closed as Homemakers, which allowed them full participation in their homes, eliminating the need to rely on the nursing home/assisted-living system and in other cases also allowed blind parents to continue raising their children independently. In addition, this year our staff worked with 190 multi-handicapped individuals who also happen to be blind. The Commission successfully achieved levels required by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Commission work diligently with employers to educate them about the potential of the blind by providing Power-Point presentations informing them of reasonable accommodations that will not lower their expectations of productivity. Consumers were placed in a variety of jobs, including translator, customer service representative, bookkeeper, daycare provider, assembly worker, rehab counselor, clerical worker, massage therapist, computer scientist, Braille instructor, telephone operators administrator, human services professional, teacher, farmer, mechanic, caseworker, mental health counselor, residential advisor, and small business owner, 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 that enables them to provide better services to our customers. In September 2007, VR counselors attended the first regional employment conference in Kansas City. Our staff also receives ongoing training on multi-handicapped issues, as individuals in this population group continue to increase. 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. Consequently, they will no longer need to receive social security benefits or welfare relating to blindness.

Counseling and guidance are 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. Furthermore, the Commission promotes a positive understanding to the general public of blindness and the abilities of people who are blind. We have the fundamental belief that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can be fully integrated into the social-economic mainstream. 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 the blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services also include career exploration, interest testing, and vocational planning. Assistance with tuition, books, technology, adaptive equipment, and readers are 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 on building partnerships with employers to encourage hiring of qualified blind job seekers.

IV TRANSITION PROGRAM

Transition services were funded by a federal grant through RSA from October 2000 through September 2005, but we were operating the programs described below before receiving this grant. Since fiscal year 2005 we have run the programs with private funds and partnership with youth councils.

Employment experiences and independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up. The Transition Program is focused on creating and supporting these opportunities across the state. The Deputy Directors coordinate the transition services together with field staff. 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.

This past summer, the WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) Program, held in Lincoln, Nebraska, provided work experiences for nine Nebraska students. During the first week of the program, students received intensive orientation and mobility instruction to become familiar with the UNL campus where they were housed and the near downtown area. They were then able to travel to and from work independently each day. Throughout the program, students increased their self-esteem by participating in weekly seminars involving discussions regarding work ethics and blindness issues. They were exposed to adult blind role models who hold competitive jobs. These role models shared their work experiences and answered the students' questions. The transition staff were in constant contact with the employers during the duration of the program to insure the success of the students in the work place. The staff also worked to educate employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of individuals who are blind. In addition, WAGES participants had challenging activities such as hiking, horseback riding, obstacle course, high ropes, and wall climbing, among others, which were geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life. The WAGES Program partnered with Greater Nebraska Youth Council, and Lincoln Workforce Development. These programs paid the salaries of the students in the program and some of the room and board.

The jobs students held included: worker at the Humane Society, Youth Program worker at Bethony Park Recreation Center, worker at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Records Management, staff assistant with the Lincoln-Workforce OneStop Center, warehouse worker at Bryan-LGH, helper at the State Office Building cafeteria, and child care assistant at YWCA day care.

The College Workshop is a program designed to provide students transitioning from secondary school with the skills and information needed to participate fully in the academic experience and employment search. This year's workshop, with 30 participants, was held with the on-going partnership of consumer organizations in the state, in which the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska provided lunch, and The National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska provided an evening social. Useful information was shared during both lunch and the evening. The keynote speaker was a blind teacher from the Texas School for the Blind, Angela Wolf, who emphasized the importance of having a positive attitude toward blindness and also mastering the alternative techniques to be a successful member of society. During the session, students engaged in a discussion on various topics including how to manage readers, deal with science courses, coping with low expectations from the general public, scholarships, and effective ways to take independent notes, social skills, self-advocacy, and workplace behaviors.

Two other programs are "Winnerfest" and Project Independence (PI). "Winnerfest" is designed for blind teenagers from across the state to participate in two semi-annual retreats. We had 22 and 18 students participating during the two sessions, respectively. Activities were focused on the importance of mastering the skills of blindness, social skills, advocacy skills, personal achievement, goal setting, adaptive equipment, communication and other life skills. One of the most important aspects of these sessions was that the participants were exposed to successful blind role models. PI is a one week program designed for younger children, ages 7 to 15 where they are introduced to social skills and to work using blindness alternative techniques. This year, the seven blind and visually impaired youngsters that participated also had an excellent opportunity to observe WAGES participants and blind adults in their work environments, using alternative skills, and demonstrating success in the workplace. During PI, the parents were involved in a seminar in which issues regarding blindness were addressed.

The Nebraska Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired is a collaborative effort among the Commission, the Department of Education, school districts, the Nebraska Center for Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, the Nebraska Department of Education Deaf-Blind Project, consumer organizations and other entities. The primary purpose is to share information with each other, advise, 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. During the 2007 calendar year the team worked with a facilitator to compile a document which will help to build partnerships between the transition stakeholders in the state. The document has been finalized and the transition team will develop a strategy on how to provide training to Commission staff and teachers from the public schools during the 2008 calendar year.

Mentoring for Excellence, a 4-year-grant, was awarded on May 2005 from the NFB-Jernigan Institute. Mentoring is a committed, supportive, and encouraging long-term relationship between

two blind participants. The older, more experienced individual (mentor) provides consistent support and guidance focused on developing the character and capabilities of the young person (mentee). Mentors have been critical to the success of many blind adults, both personally and professionally. Mentors have provided encouragement, while challenging these individuals to seek their own solutions in order to make their dreams a reality.

By participating in a mentoring program, the mentees have the opportunity to have a personal relationship with a positive blind role model; learn firsthand how other blind people lead successful lives and achieve goals; develop friendships with blind and visually impaired peers; and have fun! A state-wide activity celebrating the end of the mentoring for the first group took place September 9 and 10, in Lincoln. The second group had their state wide activity on November 9 and 10 in Omaha.

The Commission staff continues to be active in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln, Lancaster County 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 adaptive technology and computer training for blind consumers in Nebraska. This program employs three full-time Technology Specialists, located in Omaha, Lincoln and North Platte. They provide assessments, training and consultation to blind consumers and employers across the state. Furthermore, technology services were provided to consumers via telephone and e-mail. Consultations were also provided to the Social Security Administration, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Library Commission, State Treasurer, Vocational Rehabilitation agency, Unemployment Insurance Division/Workforce Development, Bryan LGH West, Saint Elisabeth Hospital, Hillis 66, WEST Corporation, PayPal, Qwest Customer Service Center, Omaha Lancaster County, Lincoln Workforce Development, University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Chadron State College, Southeast Community College, Metro Community College, Hamilton College, Doane College, Iowa Western Community College, Ohio School of Broadcasting, InFluent, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Office of the CIO, US Info, the Hyatt Hotel reservation center in Omaha, GoodWill Industries of Omaha and Grand Island, Red Cross, Cabela's, Frank House in Kearney, Methe Insurance Agency in Kearney, Home Depot in Scottsbluff, Nebraska Department of Labor, Lincoln Public Schools, Omaha public schools, Kearney public schools, McCook public schools, Minden High School, Grand Island public schools, Scottsbluff High School, Chase County High School, JRW Sales, and Google Inc., among others. The technology program also provides loaner equipment to consumers and employers.

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 feasible and more competitive. The focus continues to be on demonstrating speech systems for Windows 2000 2003, XP, and now exploring Vista. Windows-based applications with speech and magnification are taught. Voice recognition systems are also 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 THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the Blind 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 or more as students learn to apply alternative techniques to solve problems facing them in everyday life. During the training, students reside in apartments provided by the Commission. These apartments are located in downtown Lincoln.

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 tour the facility to view the various features of Center training and promote the potential of blind persons. Visitors have included students from public and private schools and colleges, vision teachers from Nebraska public schools, government officials, personnel of other governmental agencies, and businesses.

Attitude and technique training are fully integrated. The attitude training motivates the student to learn and excel at alternative techniques. 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:

- Employment search
- 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 that will eventually lead to legal blindness. They must also be capable of functioning in a training program that lasts eight hours a

day, five days a week. Prior to the start of training, 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, thereby building self-confidence and helping them learn how to think and function successfully as a blind person. Once the cycle of dependence on inadequate sight is broken and the students have learned the alternative techniques by reflex, they are able to make informed decisions regarding when to use their remaining sight.

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

Students continue to take increased responsibility in the operation of the Center - a direct result of the Center's belief in the abilities of blind people. When Center students realize 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.

During this calendar year, the Center provided intensive training to 22 clients. Additionally, seven new Commission staff members participated in the Staff Training Program. The Center also conducted 56 tours with a total of 183 individuals who were provided direct education regarding blindness from NCBVI staff. The Center continues to assist the Business Enterprise Program staff in evaluating prospective vendors.

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/or group settings at the Commission office. Through the Independent Living and Older Blind programs, individuals receive training and encouragement to continue living fulfilling lives with dignity and independence.

During the calendar year 2007, there were a total of 627 consumers served through the IL/OB programs. 527 individuals were 55 and over (OB program) while 100 were under 55 and 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 areas of cane travel, Braille, and homemaking. Those needing more intensive instruction often move on to training in the Center.

Eight Independent Living-Older Blind teachers serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved 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, and other activities of daily living. Our orientation teachers also provide instruction in the use of NFB-NEWSLINE[®] (a digital voice newspaper service accessed via touch-tone telephone), Talking Book and Braille Services (Braille and audio-cassette books and magazines), Radio Talking Book (a voice newspaper service accessed via closed circuit radio and television SAP), and use of the Internet and emails. Assistive technology devices and various aids may be provided to help individuals become more self-sufficient, including a long white cane, 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.

A new curriculum training has been implemented to enhance clients' home living skills. Clients will come for three-day sessions, and during four sessions be trained in alternative techniques as they develop their skills in a setting away from home. Training during this program is conducted using sleep shades. Sessions include: cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and focusing on 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.

The National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska worked in a partnership with the Commission to get an increase from the unicameral for services for the senior blind. As a result, the unicameral increased the budget of the Commission by \$75,000 to hire a senior blind coordinator. The coordinator was hired in October 2007 and has already started to work on building relationships with other agencies in order to compile information to assist in planning strategies to help prevent the institutionalization of older blind persons into nursing homes.

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. In 2002, the program initiated a process for identifying the deaf-blind population. To date, the number of individuals identified for the Helen Keller National Center Deaf-Blind

registry has increased to 267. In 2007, 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, 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. This program provides services and assists 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.

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 experience the combination of deafness and blindness.

IX **NFB-NEWSLINE[®] FOR THE BLIND**

NFB-NEWSLINE[®] for the Blind was established over eight years ago, and continues to grow. This program is a computer-based system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers. This year we are in the midst of talks with the Kearney Daily Hub. We have added the Nebraska Associated Press, as well as the Nebraska UPI. This brings our total number of Nebraskan newspapers resources to five, plus another six national papers, 256 newspapers across the country and six magazines which are accessible by touch-tone telephone. This also enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-NEWSLINE[®] when traveling throughout the United States twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses first a paper or a magazine, then the category within the paper, such as national, state, or local news, sports, area events, editorial opinions, TV listing or grocery ads. The listener immediately hears the first story of that

category. They can then 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 that allows the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, the availability to spell a word, go forward or backward by paragraphs, go forward or backward by sentences, and/or to search for a subject throughout the paper by a chosen word. The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 1214 users in Nebraska. NFB-NEWSLINE[®] is free of charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all 93 counties.

WHO CAN BENEFIT? **Anyone** who cannot read conventional newsprint could qualify for this free service. Many **seniors** have lost enough vision that reading the daily newspaper is no longer possible. They can enjoy being able once again to participate actively in community affairs. Furthermore, **blind children** are now able to research their own civics assignments and do their homework independently. Additionally, blind persons preparing for jobs in the year 2008 and beyond cannot afford to ignore the idea of newspaper availability. NFB-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. NFB-NEWSLINE[®] is the only service that makes so much information available to these eligible people 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NFB-NEWSLINE[®] has a speech system based on Eloquence sound which is similar to a human voice and is being used by most blind people in the country. Readers now have the option of receiving their papers via email if they have the compatible software to read it. NEWSLINE now offers the most accessible TV listings for the blind. NFB-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 and a variety of magazines.

NFB-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, NFB-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 members provide ongoing referral services to consumers. There are also a variety of services available to consumers that the agency does not provide in a direct manner. Some of those services are:

Nebraska Visually Impaired Peer Support (VIPS): This network of support groups, located throughout the state, offers an environment where individuals who are visually impaired can meet, learn from each other, and cope more effectively with blindness. 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; and to educate the public and public officials about the circumstances of aging and blindness.

Nebraska Talking Book and Braille Services is the State Library Service for the Blind and Reading Impaired. Commission staff assists consumers in completing applications and teaching consumers how to use the service and the equipment.

Consumer controlled organizations allow blind people to be exposed to other blind people in order to give them invigoration and encouragement, in addition to our services. Our counselors continue to refer clients to these consumer organizations in the state; which are the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska and the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska. Long after the rehabilitation experience is over, mentoring will continue giving them that extra support. When a person becomes blind or even grows up blind, his or her first need is to associate with other blind people. The individual initially needs to know what is possible to do as a blind person. The family won't likely know, nor will his or her community. So first, blind people need to have exposure to other blind people, not just for the encouragement from those who have done remarkable things, but also to gain a new perspective on how societal attitudes about blindness play out.

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 consumers complete applications for RTBN services and teach consumers to use the equipment.