

# NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

May 10, 2008; 9:00 a.m.

Lincoln, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Nancy Oltman, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Announcements Concerning Public Comments, Meeting Recordings, Lunch Arrangements and other Logistics:

Commissioner Majerus read the agenda items and introductions were made. It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. The Nebraska Center for the Blind clients will provide lunch. Lunch time was moved to 11:30 a.m. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting.

Commissioners present: Wes Majerus, Darrell Walla, Jim Jirak, Julie Johnson and Nancy Oltman.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-IL, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director-VR, Lincoln; Mike Rains, Orientation Counselor/Shop Instructor, Lincoln; Cindy Zimmer, Orientation Counselor/Home Management Instructor, Lincoln; Fatos Floyd, Center Director, Lincoln; Jeff Altman, Orientation Counselor/Travel Instructor, Lincoln; Sahar Hussein, Orientation Counselor/Braille Instructor, Lincoln; Jeff Poore, Apartment Resource Aid, Lincoln; Jeff Krutz, Program Specialist/Technology, Omaha; Mary Davis, Diabetic Alternatives Counselor, Lincoln; and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln. (Note: Mary Davis attended the meeting until 1:00 p.m. as NCBVI staff and attended from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. as a consumer.)

Center Clients Present: Becky McCullough, Laurel Friesen, Vivian Cockrell, Christie Brazier, Kerrie Holbert, and Donna Curry.

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, Barbara Loos, and Sidney Johnson.

#### Minutes of the February 9, 2008 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Jim Jirak noted that the Minutes should state "Darrell Walla nominated Jim Jirak as Executive Secretary. Jirak respectfully declined. Darrell Walla then nominated Wes Majerus. The motion was seconded by Jim Jirak. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion."

Commissioner Wes Majerus moved to approve the noted corrections. Commissioner Jim Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Jim Jirak noted another correction to the February 9, 2008 Commission Meeting Minutes. It was suggested that the Minutes read, "While the Virtual Networking Group did not schedule a meeting prior to adjournment, the decision was made at a previous meeting that the group would meet the first Monday evening, every two months. Based on this, the next meeting is April 7, 2008."

Commissioner Darrell Walla moved to approve the Minutes of the February 9, 2008 Commission Meeting with the noted correction. Commissioner Wes Majerus seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: The Nebraska Center for the Blind

Fatos Floyd, the Director of the Nebraska Center for the Blind sent an email to the Commissioners prior to the meeting with some detailed information about the Center. The email read is added at the end of these minutes.

Each client of the Center who was present at the meeting gave a report regarding their specific experiences at the Center.

Donna Curry - Donna marveled at the work and encouragement that she receives from Center staff. Donna stated that the staff is willing to work with her through her multiple disabilities and noted that staff goes the extra mile to help clients out with special needs.

Laurel Friesen - Laurel stated that her experiences at the Center have been good and rocky being that it is stressful at times. Laurel noted that she feels that she has blossomed in a lot of ways through her training at the Center. Laurel is currently volunteering part-time as a switchboard operator at the Department of Corrections along with attending Center training.

Christy Brazier - Christy stated that the Center staff is very helpful to her and has helped her get over many of the humps in her life. Christy has children who come to visit her at the apartments and there is always plenty to do. Christy noted that she was not born blind but became blind from a vehicle accident a little over one year ago. Christy noted that the main reason she came to the Center was because she wants to overcome her obstacles and become independent.

Becky McCullough - Becky reported that in 1975 she attended a Center for the Blind in Richmond, Virginia. Becky stated that after eight weeks of training in Richmond she accomplished nothing as clients in Richmond do not use sleep shades, except for mobility training. Becky stated that her attendance at the Nebraska Center for the Blind has been very positive and she is learning a lot. Becky stated that she really likes learning to bake and how to use her PacMate.

Vivian Cockrell - Vivian began Center training in November 2007. Vivian stated that at first things were not falling in place for her. Center staff set her up with a medical appointment and it was discovered she had a secondary disability. Vivian stated she appreciates everything that the Center does for her. Vivian noted that the training is very intense, but she enjoys it so much.

Jeff Poore - Jeff is a staff trainee at the Center and he talked about his perspective of the training from a staff person's point of view. Jeff stated that one of the main things he has learned from the training is how important a positive attitude is. Jeff added that he has learned a great deal about the capabilities of blind people. Jeff stated that he enjoys the training and he is looking forward to working with the clients at the completion of his training.

The commissioners thanked everyone for their reports and noted that they find hearing about their experiences to be very interesting.

## Report from Chairperson:

Chairperson Oltman thanked NCBVI staff for sending reports to the commissioners as they point out accomplishments of staff and provide them with much information about the activities taking place at NCBVI. Oltman thanked Fatos Floyd for sending them a copy of the client evaluations as they are very interesting. Oltman also thanked Bob Deaton for sending them the Winnerfest Report and the evaluations from the children who attended. Oltman noted that it appears that they learned a lot while they were at Winnerfest and that they were very enthusiastic with the program.

On April 20, the Delta Gamma Sorority held an event "Sundaes on Sunday" to raise money for the WAGES program. Pearl Van Zandt stated that she attended the event and had the opportunity to talk to several of the college students who were also in attendance. The college students were thrilled to meet a lot of NCBVI students and clients and it opened their eyes as to what blind people can do and it transformed their perspective from helping the blind to partnering together for a very worthwhile cause in a slightly different perspective.

Chairperson Oltman reported that the Blind Services Virtual Networking Group, for State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Commission Board Chairs, held a conference call on Monday evening, April 7, 2008. Chairperson Oltman mentioned that Darrell Walla was also on the conference call. All commissioners are welcome to participate in conference calls. The purpose of the networking was discussed. It was pointed out that the sharing of information is a great resource and with the new coalition it is important that blind people do not get lost in the shuffle. The development of the State Plan was discussed. Commissions and

Councils were also discussed and individuals reported on the operations of their agencies. The meeting in Bethesda, MD was discussed.

Commissioner Darrell Walla stated that he found all the different terminologies used during the SRC conference call interesting. Darrell Walla added that he feels it is important that the Commissioners learn the terminology. Darrell stated that he found it awesome to network with the individuals and he feels it is well worth it. Darrell added that Dr. Van Zandt does an excellent job in facilitating the conference calls. Darrell Walla noted that the Coalition would initially sound good because everyone would be working together. However, several States such as Nebraska and Iowa are lucky to have our independent agencies for the Blind. Some States have everything under one umbrella.

Chairperson Oltman thanked Hubert Paulson for his part in getting the recordings of the Commission Meetings on the NCBVI website.

Public Comment :

Hubert Paulson noted that after he records the meetings there is another party who actually posts the recordings to the website. Pearl added that Hubert is the one who works with the technology and provides the recordings in a digital manner so that they can be posted on the website.

## Executive Director Report:

Executive Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI has some T-shirts for sale. The shirts are available for purchase at the meeting. If anyone would like to purchase a T-shirt they should see her during a break or contact her at a later date.

## Field Services Report as of 1/31/08:

Total Persons Served: Voc Rehab total 487; 24 successful closures since 10/1/07 and 24 unsuccessful closures.

Independent Living total 499; 105 successful closures since 10/1/07 and 17 unsuccessful closures.

It was noted that when a case is unsuccessfully closed it often means that the client decided that they wanted to discontinue using NCBVI's services.

## Staff Update:

Cindy Holness and James Juarez are no longer working for NCBVI.

Jeff Krutz was hired April 28 for the Program Specialist/Technology position in Omaha.

The North Platte District Supervisor position was reclassified as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position. Bob Deaton and Carlos Serván are supervising the North Platte District.

Center Report:

157 full time clients have completed Center Training since 1996

Students: 34

Results: Of the clients has completed training and schooling,

91.5 percent are employed (competitive employment & homemaker)

75.8 % are competitively employed

16 % are homemakers

21 percent are students

6.3 percent are not working

43 of 85 clients (50.5%) achieved full time employment within 38 months

32.1 percent found employment from 8 months to 2 years after finishing training

11.6 percent got jobs 4 to 5 years after finishing training

5.8 percent found periodic full time jobs from 2 to 5 years from finishing training (changed to other jobs and were unemployed at times)

Center activities during the last 3 months include:

Valentine's Day activity goodies for bus drivers,

Buffet activity and bowling,

Staff training travel at the mall,

2 clients and staff attended breakfast for Senators with other commissions,

3 clients and Fatos gave an in-service at a mental health facility,

Current and former clients worked during state staff meeting as instructors,

Staff and clients attended ACB convention,

Clients attended Delta Gamma ice cream social,

Paul Kincs, Mental Health Graduate Student, meets with clients every week & with staff every other week,

Clients cooked and served lunch at May 2008 Commission Board Meeting.

General work, projects, activities:

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Mentoring project took place in Lincoln during the month of March. The focus of the project was to preparing to get employment. This is the last year for the Mentoring Grant, but it has been a tremendous opportunity for the youth who are mentees, for the adults who are providing the mentoring and for NCBVI staff.

Carlos Serván made a presentation to NCSAB in Bethesda about the progress that NCBVI makes in placement efforts. It was noted that NCBVI was very well represented at the NCSAB Spring Conference in Bethesda.

The temporary staff for Wages were interviewed and selected. The WAGES program will begin on June 15 and will end on July 26.

The Social Security Work Incentive training will take place from May 12-14 for NCBVI staff in Lincoln. Several providers have also been invited to take part in the training.

The interview for the Kearney Vocational Rehabilitation counselor position will take place on May 15.

Independent Living (IL)

Fifteen blind teenagers attended Winnerfest in March. Activities included a demonstration of accessible voting machines and a self-defense workshop.

Orientation guidelines for new drivers and readers were finalized. It was noted that NCBVI wants to ensure that the contract people and the staff who use drivers and readers have clear and professional expectations.

Bob Deaton and Deanna Jesse attended annual 2008 OIB Program Managers meeting in Alexandria, Virginia in March.

Bob Deaton, Carlos Serván, Deanna Jesse, Darrell Walla and Pearl Van Zandt attended 2008 NCSAB spring conference in Bethesda. Bob Deaton delivered a presentation on maximizing resources along with Deanna Jesse, Becky Criswell, and Greg Trapp.

#### News from District Offices

It has been a busy Quarter for the Omaha District. Jeff Krutz was hired as the new program specialist; he started training on Monday, April 28th. NCBVI will soon be opening the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position for Omaha.

Omaha District Staff has attended several training opportunities this past quarter. Some of them are as follows:

On-Line Ethic's Course in March.

Employment Symposium in Columbus on February 28.

Transition Workshop on April 4.

Issues Forum in Overland Park Kansas on April 16-18.

Social Security Training the Week of 5/12 in Lincoln.

Connie Carlow, Glenn Ervin and Nancy Flearl attend the ACBN State Convention on April 19.

The Omaha District and the other Districts have been busy working with placement.

The Omaha District has the Omaha Chamber of Commerce coming to tour and visit NCBVI about barriers to employment for blind & visually impaired and discuss how they can work with NCBVI. This will be on May 12 at 10:00 a.m.

The Omaha District will be taking a ConAgra HR Representative to visit Hyatt to see how JAWS and screen enhancement software works in a call center environment. This is the follow up from the initial meeting in creating a long term relationship. The first area NCBVI is looking at is their Work from Home Program. This will be on May 12 at 3:00 p.m.

A NCBVI consumer has been hired at WEST and a few consumers began employment at Outlook Nebraska.

NCBVI is also working with First National Bank, Wisconsin's Physician's Services, Lowes and Bakers to work on developing employment opportunities as well as assist a couple of individuals in maintaining their employment.

Several Omaha District NCBVI staff attended the Grand Opening of the UNMC Low Vision House on April 15.

NCBVI staff continues to do outreach. They have done presentations for Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging, Medicaid caseworkers. They also presented to the Service Coordinators that work with individuals with Developmental Disabilities. They have contacted the refugee relocation programs through Lutheran Family Services and Southern Sudan Community Services and they have presented to the Veteran's Home and other Veteran Services.

NCBVI does value the teachers and school districts that we work with, and there are several vision teachers in the Omaha District territory that are retiring. Cards have been sent to them to let them know how much we appreciate them.

After a year of not being able to meet due to the shortage of interpreters, Hand and Hand met on February 16. They met again on April 19 to attend Deaf Nation which was a Midwest Technology/Education Expo. This was an Expo for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to learn of new technology.

NCBVI has been working with Jean Butler the new VISTA Coordinator with the VA. As a result of this contact we have had a number of referrals from her over the past month. Over all, referrals are on the increase with 50% of them being older blind and 50% being interested in employment.

The NCBVI Lincoln District also had several clients get jobs this year. They had individuals get full time jobs as a can thrower, reservationist, salesman, custodian and construction maintenance worker. They closed individuals as Computer Systems Analyst and Librarian. A student started a part time job as a Phone Interviewer. A volunteer site was set up with the Department of Corrections. A part time work experience was set up with the Roger's House as a baker. NCBVI staff has been working hard to strengthen our relationships with employers by developing situations like this.

NCBVI will have our final session for GATE next week. NCBVI had six participants this time. Three older blind, two high school students, and a person preparing for Center training.

A computer class was added to the GATE program. NCBVI is using an Americorps member to teach the computer class. Next week they will grill out, go on a picnic and have a technology demo.

NCBVI had a Group Home Teaching for Kids last weekend and they hosted a birthday party. They talked about responsibilities for hosting a party and they wrapped presents, baked a cake, lit candles, and decorated the room.

## Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE)

All the snack and pop machines are now in place at the Zorinski Building in Omaha. All of the Federal agencies are not moved in yet. Merlin Volker is the manager for the Zorinski Building with most of his Federal Agencies moving back to the Zorinski Building.

Hardy Holm is doing the vending Braille for the snack machines for the agency since Dave Samson is no longer in the vending program.

NCBVI is going to be updating the vending at the rest areas in Ogallala and Sidney areas as soon as the rest areas are refurbished. This has been delayed but should still happen this fiscal year.

The existing machines on the rest of the Rest Areas will be spruced up this year and NCBVI will begin replacement of the remaining snack machines next year.

NCBVI replaced snack machines at the Omaha Post Office this last quarter.

The storage area for equipment has changed and NCBVI is working on alternative methods for machine transition. The transition is necessary as equipment is moved out of buildings, brought in for repair, or awaiting Surplus decisions.

## NCBVI Business Office

The Business Office of NCBVI has been busy with the surplus of old furnishings for the Lincoln District and the Center. New furnishings are also being ordered as needed.

The NCBVI has been working on an Upgrade Server farm for the agency and make arrangements for all the accounts to be transferred. The email accounts for the agency are also being upgraded. Both of these changes were mandated by the State.

Bill Brown and Kathy Stephens attended a program for the Introduction to the New State of Nebraska Budget system. This year on October 15 is when the proposal for the next biennium budget is due.

Bill Brown and Dottie Wilmott also continue to work on the eForce progress. This is the Data Management system that we received from the Iowa Department for the Blind. NCBVI is having the system reprogrammed in order to work with the NCBVI system. This process is taking much longer than was hoped, but we are slowly moving forward.

Bill Brown and Kathy Stephens received their Certification for DAS Pre-Audit. This is an internal business process that state agencies must follow.

The apartment lease for the clients was finalized.

A contract was put together for building remodeling and the process is being coordinated.

## Public Comment:

Commissioner Julie Johnson stated that she felt that the Reader/Driver Contract should include a confidentiality statement. It was noted that this was an oversight and it was the consensus that a Confidentiality Statement should be added.

Commissioner Wes Majerus asked what the rationale was for the staffing changes in the North Platte Office. Pearl Van Zandt stated that the reclassification basically resulted from an ongoing process of determining what our resources are and where the coverage needs to be and what the caseloads are in the different Districts. It was noted that the supervisors in the Lincoln District and the Omaha District also carry client caseloads.

Commissioner Wes Majerus confirmed that NCBVI is basically looking at ways to become more efficient.

Barbara Loos asked how the supervisory change in the North Platte District would affect staff in the District. Specifically, with the two Deputy Directors supervising the North Platte District would this have an impact on the supervisory level that the staff receive?

Bob Deaton stated that he and Carlos Serván have split their responsibility. Carlos Serván is supervising staff in the VR track and the support staff in the North Platte District offices and he will supervise in the IL track as well as a Counselor in the Kearney office. Bob Deaton noted that he and Carlos Serván try to maintain weekly contact with the North Platte District offices to ensure that lines of communication are open.

Barbara Loos asked for further clarification. Barbara stated that it feels to her that this will result in the staff having less close supervision. It was questioned whether this would affect the day-to-day supervision that staff in the North Platte District receive.

Nancy Oltman stated that she has complete confidence in the staffing decisions made by the Executive Director and Deputy Directors. Commissioner Walla asked if this was a budgetary decision or if there was some other rationale behind the decision.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that the decision was not a budgetary one. Pearl Van Zandt added that it is a transition reassessment issue. Even as it was with a supervisor located in the North Platte Office, this supervisor also supervised staff in the Kearney and Scottsbluff offices; therefore all staff did not have a supervisor on site. Also, the Omaha District supervisor supervises the Norfolk Office; therefore Norfolk staff does not always have a supervisor on site.

Fatos Floyd, Center Director, asked whether NCBVI is also considering reclassifying the Omaha District Supervisor position to a VR Counselor position since there is currently a vacant VR Counselor position in the Omaha office. Pearl Van Zandt stated that this is not being considered.

Chairperson Nancy Oltman stated that she believes the internal workings and staff decisions are best made by the individuals who work there everyday.

Old Business:

Budget Update:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that expenditures in the budget are on track. Staff has been successful at providing what people need at a reduced cost focusing on the employment goal. NCBVI is preparing for writing the Biennial Budget Proposal.

Last year the NFB worked to educate the Legislators about the need for state funded older blind services. This was not funded to the extent of the request, but the funding received has helped NCBVI establish what the need is and show how older blind services could help prevent older individuals from going to nursing homes which would save the state money. NCBVI is planning to include this proposal with the next Biennial Budget Proposal.

Website Update:

Pearl Van Zandt noted that keeping the postings on NCBVI website current is an ongoing challenge. Pearl Van Zandt added that the website has come a long way and it certainly something NCBVI can be proud of.

It was reported that NCBVI had been invited by Nebraska.gov to showcase its on-line services provided to the State of Nebraska at this year's Partner Event which was held in the State Capitol Rotunda on March 26, 2008 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. A total of ten state agencies were invited to participate.

Friends of the Commission:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that Friends of the Commission invite new members. It was noted that Commissioners and staff can be members. Friends of the Commission have not been very active this past quarter.

A break was taken at 11:35 a.m. Center Clients served lunch during the break period.

The meeting resumed at 11:45 a.m.

NIS:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that she, Bill Brown and Kathy Stephens from the NCVBI office had a meeting with the CIO Office and Wes Majerus last Thursday in regards to the NIS System and using JAWS. It was noted that there has been a continued problem with the accessibility of the NIS System and its compatibility with JAWS. Oracle continues to update their software and JAWS also continues to have new updates. It has been a challenge to keep the updates of both to continue to talk to one another. It was noted that some fixes will be coming out in July.

Pearl Van Zandt noted that she was pleased with the results of the meeting and she is very optimistic that the issues can be worked through, with continued follow through on specific problems.

NFB Newsline Update:

Wes Majerus gave the NFB-Newsline report that was received from Jamie Forbis. The report was as follows:

NFB-Newsline Nebraska

May 9, 2008

By Jamie K. Forbis: Nebraska NFB-Newsline Outreach Coordinator

Good afternoon Commissioners and members of the public. First let me apologize for my absence at this meeting and thank Chairman Oltman for reading this report.

NFB-Newsline Nebraska has undergone some changes for both new and existing subscribers in the last couple of months. Each time a new subscriber is added to the system a welcome letter is sent to the subscriber welcoming them to the program and giving them basic information about NFB-Newsline. The welcome letter sent to new subscribers in Nebraska has been revised and now contains information relevant to papers and contact information in Nebraska. Also recently revised is the reminder letter which is sent to subscribers who move or request their codes. The reminder letter is also a good way to remind subscribers of NFB-Newsline and the features offered. Like the welcome letter, the reminder letter contains information relevant to Nebraska. A new application form is also in the works.

The new application will include updated information and specific questions to assist me in providing the best possible service available. After the application is finished it will be distributed to all Commission offices and other organizations.

Besides the behind the seen paper work I've also been in touch with staff at the Kearney Hub and two other Nebraska papers. NFB-Newsline staff at the NFB National Office in Baltimore has begun the testing process on the Kearney Hub to see if the internet system will work with NFB-Newsline. They will report to me soon on the results. Getting the Kearney Hub on board has been a lengthy process, but hopefully it will pay off soon.

As a reminder public notices can be posted on NFB-Newsline. Listeners can press option 2 from the main menu to hear updates on the Commission and other organizations. If you or an organization have an item of interest to the blind and would like it posted to NFB-Newsline please contact me. Articles must be in word or text format.

Now on to some statistics. NFB-Newsline Nebraska currently has 1,248 subscribers. From March 1 st to May 9 th subscribers in Nebraska have made 1,957 calls and received 5,072 emails. From those 1,957 calls made users spent 40,716 minutes listening to NFB-Newsline with an average call lasting 20.22 minutes. A few fun facts; the most calls made in March were made on March 6 th and the least calls made to NFB-Newsline were made on the 21 st . In April the most calls were made on the 16 th where as the least were made on April 24 th .

Thank you to everyone who uses NFB-Newsline. It's a very vital service to blind Nebraskan's and we must keep it going.

If you ever have any questions don't hesitate to contact me at (402) 471-8102. Knowledge is power so keep up the reading!

The Commissioners thanked Jamie Forbis for her thorough report.

Client Assistance Program (CAP):

Pearl Van Zandt reported that there were no Client Assistance Program (CAP) cases this past quarter.

Public Comment:

Hubert Paulson asked how the increased gas prices will affect the agency budget. Pearl Van Zandt reported that NCBVI will stay as active as possible.

Review of Necessity of Some Items on the Agenda

It was the consensus to delete the items "Website Update" and "Friends of the Commission Update" from the agenda. These items will be discussed under "Report from the Executive Director" whenever there is something new to report on. Commissioner Oltman volunteered to contact Friends of the Commission each quarter to see if any new activities have taken place. Oltman stated that as Chairman of the Board, she will also take the liberty of placing items on the agenda as needed.

Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission (NEOC) Breakfast with the Senators

Pearl Van Zandt reported that this was a new opportunity for NCBVI to participate in an Independent agencies breakfast with State Senators. NEOC coordinated this event which was sponsored by some of the

Independent agencies such as the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Mexican American Commission, the Indian Commission, the Women's Commission, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Equal Opportunity Commission. Pearl Van Zandt reported that a number of State Senators did attend the breakfast. Several staff members from NCBVI attended the event, along with some clients and Commissioner Wes Majerus. Each agency was given approximately five minutes to showcase their mission and talk about their agency. It was noted that this was a very good experience. Commissioner Majerus stated that he also felt this was a good opportunity to have discussions with other Commissions.

#### National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Meeting in Maryland

A report was given on the Spring Conference of the NCSAB which was held in Bethesda, Maryland. Commissioner Darrell Walla attended the Conference along with Pearl Van Zandt, Bob Deaton, Carlos Serván and Deanna Jesse of the NCBVI offices. Commissioner Walla stated that this Conference was one of the greatest learning experiences that he has had in a very long time. Commissioner Walla thanked the Board for allowing him to attend the Conference and he also thanked Pearl Van Zandt for encouraging him to attend. Commissioner Walla stated that he really enjoyed attending the Independent Living Committee meeting as he felt this meeting offered a lot of useful information. On Thursday many different sessions were held. Commissioner Walla noted that all the sessions contained a lot of useful information.

Pearl Van Zandt reported that Commissioner Walla represented NCBVI very well at the Conference as he had great participation in all of the discussions. Pearl Van Zandt added that she really appreciated his full participation.

## State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that she has been working on the State Plan for FY 2009 over the past few months. A copy of the Proposed State Plan was previously emailed to the commissioners for their review and input. Pearl Van Zandt thanked everyone for their input on the Plan. It was noted that the Commission Board will need to approve the 2009 State Plan before it is submitted.

Commissioner Darrell Walla moved to approve the 2009 State Plan. Commissioner Jim Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

## Statistics of the Staff Survey

Commissioner Julie Johnson gave a report on the statistics of the NCBVI Staff Survey. It was noted that about 30% of the staff completed and submitted the survey to the commissioners. There was discussion on the responsibility of staff to complete the survey and whether or not to make it mandatory for staff to complete. Several Commissioners felt that if staff was confused on how to fill out the survey they should ask for guidance from the commissioners since the Commissioners were the ones who forwarded the survey to staff. Commissioner Julie Johnson stated that she has done a lot of work on surveys and she felt that 30% participation was not bad. It was noted that some of the confusion may have come from new staff and that supervisors will be asked to review the survey with new staff in order to clarify any questions they may have.

Pearl Van Zandt also suggested that when they see from a survey that a staff person had some confusion, they should feel free to contact that staff person to offer them clarification.

Some of the written comments from staff were as follows:

There needs to be more accountability for the clients. Clients need to take on more responsibility for themselves.

Clients and peeking. Counselors should not simply be saying "stop or I will ask you to stop again," there should be real consequences for peeking.

Problems with training new staff and the cost associated with the training.

Have staff write up a summary of what they learned during their training after they have completed it.

Would like to see bi-annual reviews with the supervisor. Would like more employee/supervisor meetings.

Would like to see a more flexible schedule. For example, work four 9 hour days and one 4 hour day.

Would like to receive increased technology training.

Would like to see higher expectations of clients and more support for staff who are working with the clients.

I love working at NCBVI.

Morale.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that the Administrative Team will address the concerns raised by staff.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that she will forward the results of the survey to all staff after today's meeting.

The commissioners reviewed the comments from NCBVI staff and discussed them with Pearl Van Zandt. Chair Nancy Oltman noted that the surveys from the staff are simply a starting point for the performance evaluation of the Executive Director. Each commissioner is to also take into consideration their personal dealings with the Executive Director and the work and accomplishments she has done at NCBVI.

There was a comment that the Key Duties as listed in the survey are confusing. It was suggested that these items be listed as a question rather than as a statement.

#### Performance and Evaluation of the Executive Director

The performance and evaluation of the Executive Director was discussed. It was decided to review the Executive Director goals of last year and set up new goals for the upcoming year at the August 2009 Commission Meeting.

Commissioner Darrell Walla moved to rehire Pearl Van Zandt as Executive Director of the next fiscal year. Commissioner Wes Majerus seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Darrell Walla moved for a 4 % raise for the Executive Director for the next fiscal year. Commissioner Wes Majerus seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

### Staff Survey for Clarity and Effectiveness

It was suggested that an accessible online survey be done with results being tallied by the system, thus avoiding human error.

It was also suggested that some of the questions be re-worded and broken up into two or three different questions, thus preventing multiple answers for one question.

Commissioner Walla stated that he feels that the completion of the staff surveys should be mandatory in order to give more credibility to the results. There was some discussion as to the legality of mandatory compliance with the survey completion.

It was suggested that Kathy Stephens could look into potential free online software for the surveys should the Commission choose to go that route. Commissioner Jirak stated that he could provide the QuestionPro software link that he has. Wes Majerus mentioned that another software survey that could be looked at is Survey Monkey.

It was the consensus to not make a decision on the revision of the staff surveys at this meeting.

The commissioners will table the issue for now and communicate on the process through some emails before the August Commission meeting. This item will be placed on the August Commission meeting agenda.

### Cost of Employee Training and Employee Turnover Rate

The Commissioners noted that the comments they hear from new staff completing Center training are very positive and that the training is helpful for them in their positions. Staff comment on the effectiveness of the Philosophy training and the strong belief in the blind that they gain during the training.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that she views the training as an investment in our staff just as NCBVI invests in our clients in order that they may achieve employment goals. Pearl Van Zandt added that she believes the Center training is very worthwhile for new staff even though it does cost a lot.

Chairperson Oltman stated that she feels the Center training is very worthwhile for staff. It was pointed out that many people may think that this is a big investment in staff when they do not stay with the agency very long. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees and many businesses go through this when investing time in staff training.

It was noted that the six month probationary period is standard for all State of Nebraska Employees.

A report on the statistics of NCBVI staff turnover was provided to the commissioners. The report emphasized that out of all the State Agencies, NCBVI ranked number 42 in turnover rate in 2006. This includes the turnover rate from the 61 classified agencies only.

NCBVI ranked number 36 for Average Years of Service. This includes data from all 79 of the state agencies except the University of Nebraska and the State Colleges.

Both set of data also represents the merger of the Dept. of Aging, Health, Institutions, Social Services and the Office of Juvenile Services (Corrections).

Both sets of data also represent the merger of Natural Resources Commission and the Water Resources Department.

In 2005, NCBVI had a higher turnover rate due to the agency layoffs that were imposed. Chairperson Oltman stated that she was very pleased with the overall statistics.

Attached to the minutes for reference is a copy of the report.

Commissioner Majerus asked about the possibility of conducting an Exit Interview with staff who choose to leave NCBVI employment on their own. Pearl Van Zandt stated that NCBVI has looked at Exit Interviews and has even tried them. Pearl Van Zandt added that her experience with Exit Interviews is that they are not that useful.

## Dates, Locations and Focus Topics for Upcoming Meetings:

The following dates, locations and focus topics were selected.

August 9, 2008, Kearney, Topic: Senior Blind Specialist position

November 22, 2008, Lincoln, Topic: Working with Employers/Focus on Employment

February 7, 2009, Omaha, Topic: Group Home Teaching Sessions

May 2, 2009, Columbus, Topic: Supported Employment

### Public Comment:

Barbara Loos - Barbara pointed out that the Commissioners should only use the staff surveys as a partial piece of the puzzle when completing the Performance Evaluation of the Executive Director. Barbara noted that she disagreed with Commissioner Jirak's comment about "not messing with the numbers." This would give staff the charge of making the decision on the Executive Director's performance. The compilation of the numbers should come from comments from staff and from the commissioners' experiences in working with the Executive Director.

Commissioner Jirak thanked Barbara Loos for her input and noted that her comments opened his mind as to the use of the staff surveys.

Mary Davis - Mary noted for the record that her attendance after 1:00 p.m. today was as a consumer and not a NCBVI staff person.

Mary stated that as a consumer attending the meeting, the meeting did not appear to be very serious towards the end. Mary added that she feels that the commissioners need to do more preparation before the meetings.

Fatos Floyd - Fatos suggested that the staff surveys ask straight and simple questions as she feels some of the questions currently used are quite obscure. Fatos also suggested that the survey questions be divided into questions about the Executive Director's Performance versus the Agency Performance and not all linked together. Fatos asked what value the question about the Boards Accessibility had to do with the Executive Director's performance.

Final Announcements:

Commissioner Walla stated that after hearing comments about making it mandatory for staff to complete the staff survey, he no longer feels that it should be mandatory. As noted earlier, the item "Staff Surveys" will be placed on the August Commission meeting agenda.

Several Commissioners asked about the possibility of receiving documents such as the survey results in Braille. Pearl Van Zandt requested that the

Commissioners inform NCBVI of documents they would like to receive in Braille and the agency will gladly accommodate them.

Adjourn:

The May 10, 2008 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 3:36 p.m.

After adjournment, the Commissioners were given a tour of NCBVI Lincoln Administrative, Field and Center Offices.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Nancy Oltman

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners