

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

August 9, 2008; 9:00 a.m.

Kearney, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Nancy Oltman, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made. It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. The Ramada Inn Restaurant will cater a buffet style lunch. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was located on the side table in the meeting room. The Act was available in both print and Braille format.

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

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Becky Bartling, Staff Assistant, Kearney; Deanna Jesse, Program Specialist/Older Blind Services, Kearney; and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln.

Former Clients Present: Terry Heany, Lincoln and Marietta Sims, Kearney

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, Dan Bird, Myrna Hansen, and Ardyce Earl.

Minutes of the May 10, 2008 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Walla moved to approve the Minutes of the May 10, 2008 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Senior Blind Specialist Position

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

FOCUS TOPIC – SENIOR BLIND SPECIALIST POSITION

Deanna Jesse, Program Specialist/Older Blind Services, was present at the meeting to provide an update on NCBVI Older Blind Services. Prior to the meeting, Deanna also sent out a lot of information regarding the Older Blind Services to the commissioners. At today's Focus Topic Deanna provided the following information:

Deanna reported that she is currently collecting letters of testimony from current and past clients regarding the impact their program with NCBVI has had on their lives and independence. To date, approximately 23 letters have been received. These letters will be shared with Senators on the Appropriations Committee.

Deanna has been working on getting an older blind survey done by Mississippi State University. This has been a slow process as the individual she has been working with at Mississippi State University has been difficult to make contacts with. The most recent call she made was on August 8 and she left a message asking if there was anything NCBVI has done to make this stop happening. Deanna noted that her conversations about the survey with Mississippi State University began in March 2008. In June, she received an email from the person she is working with saying that they would have a proposal prepared within the next week and to date, nothing has been done. Deanna stated that she does not know what the problem may be. Executive Director Van Zandt suggested that Deanna call the head of the department and inform him of the delay.

Commissioner Johnson asked what the purpose of the survey is. Deanna responded saying that the overall purpose is to identify the older blind population whose needs are not being met and to determine the needs of older blind Nebraskans. NCBVI wants to use the information when they go to the Appropriations Committee to request funds to expand NCBVI Older Blind services.

Specific goals for the study are: 1. Identify the unserved and underserved. 2. Identify those at risk of nursing home placement or placement in a more restricted living situation. 3. Identify satisfaction with services. 4. Identify the impact services have had on independence. 5. Identify unmet needs. 6. Identify how increased funding, leading to additional staff, working with additional clients will relieve other financial burdens. 7. Identify the difference in acceptance rate of Older Blind services. 8. Projection of blindness in NE in 2010 and later. 9. Identify need for employment services in Older Blind Program.

Deanna noted that when she first spoke to staff at Mississippi State University it was the goal to have the survey 100 percent completed by December 2008. At this point, Deanna stated that she does not know if this can be accomplished. If this cannot be accomplished, we may not want to proceed with the survey.

Deanna stated that she will follow-up and make another contact with Mississippi State University.

NCBVI maintains contact with all Area Agencies on Aging to insure that we are working together toward the mutual goal of independence for our clients. Currently we are doing a short survey of the staff about the number of visually impaired and blind persons they work with.

The purpose of this survey is to get some information regarding the number of clients that they have who are visually impaired or blind. Deanna noted that they are gathering some very useful information.

Deanna has attempted to get statistics from ophthalmologists regarding the number of patients they see who are legally blind or have very limited vision. Most ophthalmologists do not keep their charts in electronic format and so can not pull those numbers.

Deanna, along with support staff, are currently working with all phone companies to get our Older Blind services listed in the yellow pages under Senior Services in an effort to be more assessable to family members of the older blind. Deanna noted that there is no cost for this service.

NCBVI will be the Agency of the Month on the American Foundation for the Blind Senior Site in March 2009.

She is working with Talking Book and Braille Services to have information packets sent out to all patrons of their program who were not referred to them by our agency or who they have not already referred to us. We are attempting to make sure that people find out about our services.

We regularly attend the Money Follows the Person board meetings. This program has the goal of moving 900 people out of nursing homes and back into their communities. This will include visually impaired Nebraskans. We provided training to the new Transition Coordinators regarding our services and the process of making a referral to us.

The North Platte District will hold a For Your Independence (FYI) program in North Platte from Sept. 15 to 18. This is a skill training program for Independent Living clients aged 55 and older. For more information contact Angie Hoff, Orientation Counselor 308-631-1339 or Deanna Jesse, Program Specialist 308-865-5442.

Denise Johnston Rauterkus, Rehabilitation Counselor, will speak at the Optometric conference, being held in Kearney Oct. 24 and 25. We will also have an information booth.

Angie Hoff, OC, has suggested that we send follow up letters to older blind clients whose cases were closed declining further services, about 6 months after they are closed. At that time they might be interested in services. We will work on this project.

NCBVI had a booth at the Care Givers Coalition, Day of Caring in Hastings on April 17. We will have agency information at the Dundy County Health Fair, Aug. 15 in Benkelman. Bob Shankland, OC will staff a booth at the Health Fair at Clay County Senior Services Nov. 7.

Bob Deaton, Deputy Director of Independent Living Services and Deanna Jesse, Program Specialist for Older Blind Services, presented with three people from other states at the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind in Washington DC on April 24. They discussed NCBVI older blind programs.

Deanna Jesse attended a training workshop through the University of NE – Omaha on data collection using Census Reports. Bob Deaton and Deanna will attend a Data Users Conference at UNO.

State Visually Impaired Support Groups are asking for a program on our Older Blind Services. Others who want a speaker can contact Deanna Jesse at 308-865-5442.

As part of the Aging Coalition in Kearney, NCBVI has been the focus topic on Talk of the Town, a local talk show on KGFW radio station.

NCBVI was invited to be part of the Joint Agency Meeting in Alliance this spring and shared information about our programs.

We are meeting with State Senators to discuss our Older Blind Program and our needs for expansion of the program to meet the needs of Older Blind Nebraskans.

Deanna concluded by stating that while this is not inclusive of the activities that have taken place, her report covered the highlights of the Older Blind Program Specialist.

Commissioner Walla noted that Deanna Jesse and Bob Deaton had a great speech at the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind in Washington DC.

A couple of individuals who have received NCBVI services were present at the meeting to discuss how the services have impacted their life.

Terry Heany – former client.

Deanna Jesse introduced her first guest, Terry Heany. Terry is a former client of the Nebraska Center for the Blind. Deanna noted that timing was a very crucial part in Terry's successes.

Terry stated that he was all set to go to the Masonic Home in Plattsmouth when NCBVI staff Connie Daly got a hold of him and talked. Connie was not ready to let him go and persisted. He went to Center for one day, but he was still not totally interested. At end of the day he sat with Connie and Fatos Floyd to talk. He informed Connie and Fatos that he was going to go to the Masonic Home in Plattsmouth. Fatos said to him "is that what you are going to do for the next forty years of your life?" Terry stated that those words from Fatos totally impacted his life as he then did a three day stay at the Center. The following week he was a full time client. Terry stated that he learned many things during his Center training that put him back into the work field. Terry indicated that the training was very intense. Terry stated that after 2 ½ months he walked away thinking it was too much. Then Mary Davis who was a former student of center and a current employee of NCBVI talked to him for a few hours. After their discussion, he decided there was much more to learn and many more things he could do. Terry stated that his final travel experience was that he had to buy a bus ticket to Omaha, spend the day in Omaha and then take a bus back to Lincoln. Terry stated that he went to the Jocelyn museum, to the Omaha office and out to eat before he caught the bus back to Lincoln that evening. Terry noted that he felt all his classes were excellent and he now feels that there was no better place for him to be than in the school.

Terry reported that he currently works with the GED Program in Lincoln. At first this was a volunteer position and then it became a paid position. Terry noted that he also does contract work at the Nebraska Center for the Blind. He basically fills in for Home Management as needed.

Marietta Sims – former NCBVI Client

Deanna introduced Marietta Sims and noted that most of her family does not live in Nebraska. Marietta has a circle of friends in the area and Deanna noted that she has a hard time finding her because she keeps so busy.

Eight years ago, Marietta worked with the local newspaper, the Kearney Hub, to start up a program called the Talking Hub. With Marietta's help they had volunteers reading portions of the Kearney Hub and then people could call into an Info Hub number and access the Talking Hub to hear parts of the paper being read. This was a wonderful service but was recently disconnected for various reasons.

Marietta stated that she was first introduced to NCBVI in 1992. She is very thankful to the counselor for training she received and confidence she gained to realize that she can do it. She noted that she gained many skills to help her learn to live independently. Some of the skills she learned are cooking, cane travel, threading needles and slicing lettuce. Marietta stated that many people do not want to be taught blind skills because they do not want to think like that. It is very important to not shut the door when someone refuses services because many times people will come back when they are ready. Marietta also indicated that she feels it is extremely important to listen to individuals who come to the Commission for services or assistance.

Marietta thanked NCBVI for coming to Kearney for the Board Meeting and she thanked Executive Director Van Zandt for being such an inspiration to her.

She noted that one thing she has been trying to accomplish is getting a photo I.D. Currently Nebraska charges \$25 for individuals to get a photo I.D. and she does not feel it should be the same cost as a driver's license. She has tried to have legislation passed to reduce the cost of a photo I.D. but has been unsuccessful.

Public Comment:

Ardyce Earl commented that she feels too many things about NCBVI services are only on the computer or the NCBVI website. She feels that NCBVI needs another way to get information out as not everyone has a computer.

Deanna Jesse noted that there is an ad on the radio about NCBVI services.

Commissioner Jirak asked if NCBVI advertises the availability of NCBVI services on Radio Talking Book and on Our TV.

Van Zandt stated that she believes the Commission meeting notices are sent to Radio Talking Book.

Deanna Jesse stated that she will contact Radio Talking Book and Our TV to find out if they are advertising NCBVI services. Deanna stated she will also contact some local radio stations to see about having a Public Service Announcement (PSA) to publicize NCBVI services. The local counselor can then select clients to record the PSA's.

Hubert Paulsen noted that many older people go to their pastors when they begin to have vision loss. Deanna stated that she will add Ministerial Associations to her list of contacts.

Deanna Jesse informed the Commissioners that they should contact her at any time they have an idea on how NCBVI can expand its Older Blind services. Executive Director Van Zandt indicated that the Commissioners could also send her an email and she will forward it to Deanna.

Myrna Hansen stated that she feels it would be helpful for sighted people to know what blind people want. Many sighted people do not know how blind people want to be treated.

Chairman Oltman stated that it is always okay to ask a blind person how they wish to be treated, as all blind people do not wish to be treated the same way.

Commissioner Walla added that many sighted people are not educated on what blind people can do. There is a great need to educate sighted people on this subject.

Deanna Jesse mentioned that NCBVI has a video entitled "The Encounter." This video basically covers what you should do when you meet a blind person.

The commissioners thanked everyone for a very interesting Focus Topic and noted that they enjoyed learning more about the Program Specialist/Older Blind position.

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.

Chairperson Oltman publicly congratulated Bill Brown on receiving the 2008 Manager of the Year Award and Kelly Coleman for receiving the 2008 Employee of the Year Award.

Chairperson Oltman noted that NCBVI's Fire Safety activity was a wonderful event. The comments in the newspaper from Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor, were very accurate and good. The overall publicity in the newspaper and on the television was also very good.

Chairperson Oltman reported that the Blind Services Networking Group, for State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Commission Board Chairs, held a conference call on Monday evening, August 4, 2008. All commissioners are welcome to participate in conference calls. The purpose of the networking was discussed. They now have an agenda which is very helpful. Oltman reported on the RSA meeting in St. Louis. It was noted that many agencies have budget concerns and they talked about the meetings that will be coming up for NCSAB, CSAVR in November in San Diego. New coalitions will meet in San Diego. Oltman stated that she feels it is important to keep informed about the new coalitions to ensure that it does not get to the point of elimination of separate agencies for the blind.

Chairperson Oltman thanked Hubert Paulson for his part in the recording of the Commission Meetings.

Chairperson Oltman reported that she went to the RSA meeting in St. Louis. After the first day she became ill and her family came and got her. Oltman did attend the first part of the meeting and noted that it was very educational. Each state spoke about problems, successes and what they expected to get out of the meetings. Some agencies have problems getting board members to attend their Commission Board meetings, not just getting the public to attend. Some board members need more information on what they are to do. Oltman informed the other agencies present that NCBVI has a packet for new board members. The next day was the workshops. It was reported that all the modules are on the website for RSA. Oltman stated that she plans on completing them all on line and she encouraged all the commissioners to work on all the modules to gain information.

Commissioner Walla encouraged all commissioners to attend one of the NCSAB meetings session in order to gain some very useful information, and he noted that he attended a meeting in Bethesda this past spring.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Executive Director Report:

Van Zandt verbally gave highlights of her report and she thanked the Commissioners for their time. Chairperson Oltman requested that the entire report of the Executive Director be placed in the minutes, so it is inserted here:

State Plan

RSA has contacted us for revisions of our State Plan. There are a few minor changes and updates required of us, which will be sent next week.

Field Services Report as of June 30, 2008:

Total Persons Served

Voc Rehab (VR) 530; 37 successful closures since 10/1/2007 (38 unsuccessful)

Independent Living (IL) 584; 141 successful closures since 10/1 (25 unsuccessful)

Staff Update

Jeff Krutz is no longer working for NCBVI, as of August 4.

Sarah Stewart started with the agency on June 2, 2008 and upon completion of training, will work as a VR Counselor in the Kearney Office.

Chad Weber started with the agency on July 7, 2008 and upon completion of training, will work as a VR Counselor in the Omaha office. Chad has been working in Minnesota and brings several years of experience working in the disability field.

Candy Laursen is now in the Lincoln office. She will do both VR and OC work, but officially is an Orientation Counselor.

Jamie Forbis, North Platte, is working 40 hours per week until the district is fully staffed, possibly mid-September.

Center Report

157 Full-time Clients Completed Center Training from 1996 through July 2008.

Competitive Employment: 93

Home Makers: 20

Students: 34

Results: Of the clients who have 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

Activities during the last 3 months:

1. Tango dance classes 2 times

2. Pot luck for Client lounge celebration buffet activity

3. Etiquette class by Cindy
4. Group volunteer activity with AmeriCorps
5. NFB convention
6. Fire safety activity
7. Grilling activity
8. Two clients sent baked goods to county fair & won ribbons
9. Employment networking work shop
10. Three clients were part of the WAGES program
11. Apartment activities: pizza party, DVD, jazz in June, farmers market shopping

Nebraska Business Enterprises

The Zorinski Building in Omaha is now occupied and we have vending machines on five floors. They have totally closed the Federal Building at 106 S. 15th and we have taken our equipment out of there. The IRS and FBI sites are now run by Amy Sweigard; Merlin Volker is the sole Facility Manager at the newly remodeled Zorinski Building.

We have put new fronts on the Snack Machines on the Interstate Routes that needed them and repainted the cages and are still waiting for the Sidney rest areas to be completed.

We have been working on arranging room in Kearney for Terry Harris to use two days/week. He will be in Lincoln three days/week. He will use the two days mostly to support and further train vendors on I-80, to increase the revenues & business efficiency of those vendors.

Business Office

Bill's work has focused on the Draft Biennium Budget; projections for next year, closing out the State Fiscal Year; Eforce Progress; Ordering Computers and set ups; Network and copier set up for electronic copies; Information to State Auditors on Travel Audit; Putting things in place for Dave to work out of Norfolk 5 days/week, except when there are meetings or other obligations which have to be done in Lincoln. We will track this to make sure that the work gets done as efficiently as ever and solve any problems that might come up.

We are beginning to get some preliminary information on open enrollment, which will run from October 20th to November 17th this year. When a few more items are decided by State Personnel, Dave will send out his annual "Open Enrollment Preparation e-mail."

Dave conducted voucher preparation training with the support staff in Kearney, North Platte and Scottsbluff, from July 21-23 and the training went exceptionally well. Becky, Sherrie and Josie will begin processing payment vouchers for client related bills immediately. Bill and Dave are working out the paperwork flow and the process, to assure timely processing, since it's taking place in each office. Upon Nicole's return from maternity leave, Dave will schedule her training. Betty and Cheryl were trained earlier this year and are doing a great job of paying the Lincoln District client bills.

Dave continues to "fine tune" his new working arrangement, in Norfolk the great majority of the time. He is extremely grateful to Bill and Pearl for giving this a try and to all staff for keeping the communication working.

Kathy Stephens went to Hadley School for the Blind Ambassador Training – May 15-16.

Procurement Full Scope – NIS Training – attended July 15-17.

Attended a Payroll-Human Resource Meeting (NIS) July 30.

Continue to keep website updated.

Continue to assist with payroll processing.

Work with Transportation Service Bureau on vehicle maintenance and repairs.

Field Services

Training was provided to staff on Social Security Work Incentives, etc. Larry Roos did a great job coordinating the workshop, which was well received.

WAGES program ended July 25; 9 students participated. We had a banquet and the students, their parents, and employers were present. Students, parents and employers all spoke to the high quality of the program and what a difference it makes to the youth who participate. Carlos was invited to speak at the Lancaster County Commissioners meeting on August 12.

The 'Today's Job Seekers: Tomorrow's Leaders' conference was held August 5-7 in Lincoln. We had 37 employers attending and 35 job seekers. The Placement Committee organized this event. Connie worked very hard on coordinating the Conference; many other staff also did a lot of work, including working with business people to engage employers in the conference. Buna Dahal, Consultant, provided an excellent program. Concrete changes could be seen in some of the participants as a result; employers were clearly impressed with the capabilities of the blind job seekers.

The final Mentoring activity will take place during the last week of September.

Districts are working well together, supporting each other while staff are in training, on leave, or positions are vacant.

Omaha District staff, as well as Nancy Coffman and Jan Brandt, have worked closely to meet the technology needs of clients. We are so fortunate in the staff that we have here at NCBVI.

Nicole Schopen the VR Tech in Omaha had a baby girl on June 26th. Nicole is due back to work on August 12th. We have had a temporary staff person working with us Kristen Malone, who has been excellent.

We have been quite fortunate this year to have Support Service Providers (SSP's) that allow us to hold our Hand & Hand meetings for Deaf Blind Individuals. Last year it was very frustrating. In using SSP's it was decided that there was a need for training.

Cheryl Poff, our deaf blind project coordinator organized a training for individuals working as SSP's to understand more about deaf blindness. She is coordinating this with Meghan Kurtz from Nebraska Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing. They will address the types of deaf/blindness, Panel of Deaf Blind individuals that will field Questions and Answers and then hands on experience visiting and working with Deaf Blind Individuals. The training is on August 9th from 10-2 pm

Kathy Brown has been meeting with a number of clients in the Omaha office to do some benefits counseling and will be assisting another client with a PASS Plan for attending a private college.

This year we had just a one day activity for Project Independence. We originally had between 8-10 students for the program, but several were ill throughout the summer and another student was not able to make it. With only 6 students it was decided to cancel the week long program. Instead we met on July 21st in Lincoln. We started with a seminar on the benefits of volunteering. Everyone discussed what their interests were and where else they could volunteer. We did some skill training; participants did the grilling of hot dogs and polish sausage for themselves, Center clients, and for representatives of the fire department. We had the staff from the Fire Prevention Unit with the Lincoln Fire Department work with us on Fire Alarms, smoke detectors, the proper way of putting out grease fires, and hands on training in using a fire extinguisher. It was a great day and everyone learned a great deal from this experience. Rick Campos who worked closely with Fatos Floyd and Connie Daly in setting up this training gave us information to share with the Omaha Fire Department to be able to duplicate it here in Omaha.

The Omaha office had many activities with our teen age group teaching sessions (TABS), including a recent scavenger hunt.

The Senior Group Teaching sessions (SAILS) will begin again on August 26 after having a month break.

We are working with Outlook Nebraska, Omaha, to see if they can become a producer of white canes. Jeff Altman and Nancy Flearl have been the leaders on this project.

GATE group teaching program was held in Lincoln, with six clients participating. Four were older blind and two were high school students. An interpreter was provided to for a gentleman from Iraq. We were fortunate to have an Arabic speaking counselor who worked with him on Arabic Braille. We also included computer training as a part of the curriculum and several clients have requested more computer training.

Clients in Lincoln District got jobs as After School Curriculum Coordinator, Home Health Aide, and three Youth Counselors for the summer (one in Nebraska and two in other states).

North Platte District staff are working well with Carlos and Bob providing supervision. The Deputy Directors are doing a good job to assure a smooth transition for the district.

Planning for FYI, the Group teaching program in North Platte, is underway. FYI will be held in September.

All districts are doing a good job bringing clients to the Center for tours and training.

We revised "Losing Vision in Your Later Years" brochure. As soon as we have a photo to use on the front of it, copies will be printed for distribution.

The link to older blind services on our web site has been revised with new and more current information. "Older Blind Services: A Historical Perspective" was submitted to the Board of Commissioners in preparation for the focus topic discussion and was posted to our web site.

The semi-annual Minority Outreach Report was completed earlier this month. Each office is planning on reviewing the plans for next year, to focus more specifically on contacts with agencies and organizations most likely to generate referrals representative of minority populations.

Deanna has begun a survey of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) caseworkers to get an idea of how many blind and visually impaired persons are being served through these agencies. There are 8 AAA offices across the state. So far, Deanna has surveyed staff in North Platte, Norfolk, and Beatrice. Bob Deaton accompanied Deanna at meetings in Norfolk and Beatrice.

Carlos, Pearl, Deanna and Bob have been meeting with Senators on the Appropriations Committee. So far, we have met with Senators Fulton, Nantkes, and Nelson.

The Placement Committee is keeping busy on a number of projects:

Contacting employers who attended the Governor's Summit last year;

Obtaining testimonials from business people who employ blind persons;

Working on resource packets with agency brochures, information on Tax Credits, and other information; and,

Coordinating the upcoming training session by Erin Reihle, which will target the hospital industry about thinking creatively to employ people with disabilities. – end of Executive Director's report.

Commissioner Walla asked that the Commissioners be provided with a synopsis of how the Mentoring Program went. Walla requested information regarding what was successful and what could be improved. Walla indicated that he would like more information about the Mentoring Program. Walla added that if NCBVI wants to be involved in the Mentoring Program, they need to know what was good and what was not good. It was noted that the Mentoring Program was a grant funded project.

Van Zandt stated that if a Commissioner is aware of anything that did not go well, she would hope that they will communicate that with her. Since the Mentoring program was a grant, there will be various reports that will be compiled at the completion of the project. Van Zandt stated that she will share these reports with the Commissioners. Van Zandt stated that the exit interviews will also be shared with the Commissioners.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she would like to see survey results from what they did in Baltimore. Van Zandt indicated that she will check to see if Baltimore can send us the survey results.

Commissioner Oltman mentioned that Nebraska was one of the first state's to get involved in the Mentoring Program; and therefore, it was likely that there would be some things that need improvement. Commissioner Walla added that as a Commissioner, they need to be aware of the whole picture.

Van Zandt noted that NCBVI does debrief on all the activities and projects we are involved with and we learn and change from that. Van Zandt added that to give the Commissioners feedback like that on everything NCBVI does would be quite hard to manage, but for a grant funded program, we can certainly provide feedback.

Commissioner Walla asked if NCBVI can contract out technology work while the Technology Specialist position is vacant in order that we can continue to teach computer skills to clients. Van Zandt reported that NCBVI does contract with individuals who have the skills to do this work.

Commissioner Jirak requested that having attended the "Today's Job Seekers – Tomorrow's Leaders" workshop he would like Connie Daly to send out a follow-up survey to clients and employers who attended to get feedback on the workshop.

Van Zandt stated that she is not aware if a follow-up survey is being planned; however, she is aware that Connie and Buna did speak to a lot of the clients and employers after the training and did get some feedback, both positive and suggestions for improvement. Van Zandt noted that these things are being considered for future trainings.

Commissioner Jirak asked if he could email to Connie his feedback on the training. Van Zandt stated that this would be fine.

Commissioner Johnson stated that Deanna Jesse had mentioned that NCBVI is requesting additional money for the Older Blind program in order to offer additional services and/or positions. Commissioner Johnson asked for clarification on what this may be.

Van Zandt reported that this issue will be discussed under the topic Biennium Budget Request Proposal.

Public Comment:

Deanna Jesse reported that Kearney has a Tango community and on September 6 there will be a public Tango dance in Kearney. Deanna indicated that she is going to send an invitation to clients and staff to attend this event.

Old Business:

Biennium Budget Request Proposal:

Van Zandt reported that she had previously emailed the Board many budget spreadsheets. The State of Nebraska is set up on a biennium basis. The next biennium begins on July 1, 2009 and goes through June 30, 2011. Many of the State's financial reports are based on the federal fiscal year, but the biennium budget request is based on the state fiscal year.

There are some increases in state agency budgets which the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) automatically computes and basically informs agencies on the increased rates. Examples are such things as state vehicle leases and building rent. The budget within the state has two primary categories: operations and government aid. Operations include such things as salaries, benefits, staffing issues, buildings, cars, office supplies computers, etc.

Government Aid includes funds paid for services and aid to individuals. For the VR program this includes tuition for continuing education and products/gadgets we provide to clients such as technology. Government Aid also covers programs NCBVI puts on for individuals or groups. The current budget for 2009 is \$4,404,345. In the budget proposal you go from the base year and project what is needed for the next two years. NCBVI has two portions of our budget proposal. One is as NCBVI exists today and another part is with issues. Issues are when you have something new that you want added to your budget. Some years there are no issues, but this year the Senior Blind Program is NCBVI's issue portion. The funds we are looking at for 2010 without the issues is \$4,331,863 and for \$4,404,255 for 2011. At this point, NCBVI is going to request \$194,271 for the Senior Blind project for 2010 and \$390,440 for 2011. Some of this funding would be used for operations but most of it would be to add an orientation counselor position in each District in order to increase the amount of staff support that we have and to add a Technology Specialist position that would be specific to the Senior Blind program.

For the second year NCBVI is requesting funds for NCBVI to have two new orientation counselor positions in each District.

Van Zandt reported that this was an overview of the budget proposals and she asked if anyone had any specific questions.

Commissioner Walla inquired as to whether NCBVI has staff who will be retiring soon. Van Zandt reported that in 2017 is when many NCBVI staff will be at social security retirement age. Van Zandt noted that it will cost NCBVI when staff leaves and she has been looking at this. Van Zandt stated that, in general, it is planned to replace staff as they leave and they also keep track of where the caseload is.

Chairman Oltman inquired as to what kind of feed back she is getting from Senators regarding the Older Blind program. Van Zandt reported that the Governor spoke with Directors of State agencies a few months ago and at that point the Governor was saying that he would like to see a zero percent increase from every State agency except for Education and Medicaid. The Senators are aware of this, but they are very conscious about the impact NCBVI services have. The Senators are very interested to hear the results of the work that Deanna Jesse and Bob Deaton are doing and the people that are out there, needing services. Van Zandt noted that the State is spending millions of dollars to provide Medicaid care to clients. For each person it is about \$50,000 person per year which does not include prescription costs. The State actually has contracted with a company to try to identify those who have multiple chronic conditions to see how Medicaid costs could be cut. Van Zandt noted that there is money and it is being spent where it needs to be spent. Van Zandt added that NCBVI is demonstrating with our senior blind and vocational rehab services is that when NCBVI helps individuals keep off of Medicaid & government support, and have them working, earning money, paying taxes, consuming in the community . NCBVI really does have an impact in decreasing those billions of dollars spent on Medicaid with combined state & federal funds.

Chairman Oltman noted that a senator did indicate that they would like to tour the NCBVI Center this fall.

Van Zandt encouraged everyone to speak to their policy maker and ask them to spend a day with a NCBVI staff field person. The Commissioners concurred that this was a good idea.

Chairman Oltman stated that it will be a challenge keeping all the senators informed and up to date about NCBVI with the two year term limits. Van Zandt concurred noting for the record that new Senators have so much to learn and with the term limitation, their time to get all the information is very short. Therefore, the Senators appreciate it when individuals across the State inform them of issues.

Commissioner Walla made a motion to endorse the budget proposal with the understanding that there is still work to be completed on it. Commissioner Majerus seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

NIS Update:

Van Zandt reported that there were changes to NIS as it relates to employees accessing their paystubs. Commissioner Majerus worked hard to address the accessibility issues that blind users were having. Majerus sent NCBVI instructions on how to access the paystubs and the instructions are also on the NIS home page. Van Zandt reported that a new version of NIS has recently been put into place and Commissioner Majerus worked with NCBVI staff to install new JAWS scripts.

Commissioner Majerus noted that Van Zandt's report was on target, and he added that he also reformatted the way the paystub reads. Majerus noted that the new format is easier for a blind user to read.

The Future of NIS – Commissioner Majerus informed everyone that he was offered and accepted a position in Baltimore, MD with the International Braille and Technology Center of the National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute. Majerus reported that he will be starting his new position right after Labor Day. In this regard, Commissioner Majerus stated that he will relinquish his duties as a NCBVI Commissioner after today's meeting. Commissioner Majerus stated that he will be working with President Buresh of NFB to find a replacement.

Van Zandt reported that the Office of the CIO is also trying to find an immediate replacement for Majerus doing the type of testing that Majerus does. The Office of the CIO has asked the NCBVI for assistance in searching for a replacement.

NFB-Newsline® Update:

Jamie Forbis emailed the NFB-Newsline® Update to Chairperson Oltman on Friday. Oltman then forwarded the email to the entire Board, Pearl and Kathy. Everyone should have the report in their in-box when they get back home. Commissioner Jirak requested getting the report from Jamie earlier in order that the Commissioners would have an opportunity to review it before the meeting. Chairman Oltman indicated that she will suggest this to Jamie.

Chairman Oltman covered some of the highlights of the report. It was noted that NCBVI Commission meeting announcements are sent to the NFB-Newsline® Update. It was suggested to add the Focus Topic for the meeting to the Commission Meeting notice. Everyone agreed that this was a good idea.

For informational purposes, the report was as follows:

NFB-Newsline®

August 9, 2008

By Jamie K. Forbis, Nebraska Outreach Coordinator

Good day Commissioners and members of the public! NFB-Newsline® has undergone some major changes. Channel two from the main menu now has a new format to make public announcements more organized. After pressing 2 from the main menu you will be prompted to select one of four options. These options are: 1. National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, which includes information from the President of the NFBN, convention updates, and the NFBN's quarterly news letter. 2. Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which includes a section for the Board of Commissioners as well as a section for programs and events. 3. Other Organizations Dealing with Blindness, which has a section for the American Counsel of the Blind. 4. Public Transit Systems, which I am pleased to announce includes the new Lincoln StarTran bus schedules. Turn by turn directions using cardinal directions will be posted soon. In the near future I would also like to include other public transportation options under this channel.

Please explore the new format and tell me what you think. If there are any sections you would like to see added or articles to be posted please contact me.

I recently attended a face to face meeting with the director of NFB-Newsline®, Scott White. He had some great ideas for outreach and increasing readership. I hope to put some of these techniques into place

soon. I also attended a seminar at the National Federation of the Blind National Convention on transferring newspapers onto portable devices.

NFB-Newsline® Nebraska currently has 1,262 subscribers. From June first to August eighth Nebraska subscribers have read 34, 725 minutes of content and received 4,492 emails, with an average call lasting 16.54 minutes. With NFB-Newsline® now available on www.bookshare.org it's getting harder to track the number of emails received. Fun facts: In June the most calls made to NFB-Newsline® were on the 8th of the month and the least calls made were on the 20th. In July the 8th was also the popular day where as the 13th had the least calls made to NFB-Newsline®.

Don't forget to send me announcements to post to NFB-Newsline®! I can be reached by leaving a voice mail at (402) 471-8102 or at my new email address: newsline@ne.nfb.org. Thank you for your support and enjoy the rest of your summer!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

There were no CAP Cases this quarter.

A Lunch Break taken at 12 noon.

Meeting resumed at 12:25 p.m.

Review of Staff Survey; new ideas and possible changes:

Commissioner Johnson shared with the commissioners a draft staff survey that encompasses the suggestions received from other commissioners. Commissioner Johnson noted that the document is just a draft and she is open to suggestions and revisions.

Commissioner Johnson indicated that she has included instructions for filling out the survey and stated the purpose of the survey in the document. Commissioner Johnson added that she feels it is important for staff to know how the survey is going to be used.

Van Zandt stated for the record that the Commissioners are discussing the internal survey of NCBVI staff which is done once a year in conjunction with the evaluation of the executive director and it is an annual pulse of the Commission inquiry.

Print copies were handed out and Wes Majerus read the draft survey. Sections A and B of the survey were discussed.

The Commissioners agreed to re-word paragraph two to read as follows:

“The below ten statements will be used by the Board of Commissioners to evaluate the performance of the Executive Director in conjunction with the Board assessments. Staff input assists the Board in making decisions concerning salary, retention of the Executive Director and other concerns.”

The commissioners also agreed to add the following statement to Section B of the survey: “I believe the feedback I provided today is valued and appreciated.”

Commissioner Johnson indicated that she would eventually like to explore the idea of staff being able to complete this survey on line.

The Commissioners requested that Kathy Stephens and Director Van Zandt explore putting the survey on line with Nebraska.gov.

Kathy will make the noted revisions to the survey and resend it out to commissioners for their review and additional input.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Election of Board Officers:

Commissioner Johnson nominated Commissioner Nancy Oltman as Chairman of the Board. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. Chairman Oltman gave the Chair to Commissioner Walla. A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Oltman abstained. The remaining four commissioners voted in favor of the motion. Commissioner Oltman took back the Chair.

Commissioner Walla nominated Commissioner Julie Johnson as Vice Chair. Commissioner Majerus seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Johnson abstained. The remaining four commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Walla nominated Commissioner Jim Jirak as Executive Secretary. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Jirak abstained. The remaining four Commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Executive Director's Goals for the Fiscal Year:

Executive Director Van Zandt noted that she previously emailed her goals for FY 2009 to the Commission Board and all NCBVI staff. Van Zandt requested input from the Commissioners regarding the goals.

Chairperson Oltman indicated that she felt that the goals were very well written and to the point. All Commissioners concurred.

The Commissioners requested that this document be posted on the website under a new link entitled: Goals for 2009.

For informational purposes, the goals are as follows:

GOALS FOR THE NCBVI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

State Fiscal Year 2009 Pearl Van Zandt, Ph.D.

These goals drive my work and focus my energies daily.

I. Manage the NCBVI service delivery system to assure that consumers develop the confidence and skills to achieve their goals; including service delivery to individuals, positive relationships with consumer organizations, and effective work with employers and the public to ensure job opportunities for blind persons.

II. Administer fiscal operations of NCBVI to maximize resources, plan for emergencies, and create opportunities for growth and development.

III. Establish and nurture a work culture that attracts exemplary job applicants and that enables employees to perform quality work, grow personally and professionally, and maintain a strong commitment to NCBVI's mission.

Objectives for the State Fiscal Year 2009:

Goal I. Service Delivery.

Objective 1.

Focus efforts for Vocational Rehabilitation clients on achieving high quality full-time employment outcomes with wages comparable to the average State wage level.

Objective 2.

Increase the number of Transition clients who become successfully employed or who pursue education and training geared toward elevated personal expectations.

Objective 3.

Implement protocol for working effectively with blind children in schools, with educators, and with families. Provide training to staff and educators, in conjunction with Department of Education, on approaches for effective communication and coordination with parents and educators.

Objective 4.

Further the Senior Blind Project to document the needs, identify ways to more effectively serve seniors, strengthen networks with generic aging and community services, and if funded, hire and train service providers in each District with a dedicated caseload of older blind persons.

Goal II. Fiscal Operations.

Objective 1.

Continue and enhance outreach to Senators and other policy makers about services for the blind, encourage Center tours and visits with Staff, Commissioners and clients in legislative districts.

Objective 2.

Monitor expenditures and fund balances to keep within the budget, and to keep service provision at a level that supports quality employment and independent living outcomes for clients. In operations, monitor workload activity and area needs to determine if staffing levels are adequate.

Objective 3.

Utilize data gathered by Senior Blind Project to quantify potential savings to the State of Nebraska as a result of funding provided to expand the services older blind persons.

Goal III. Workplace Culture

Objective 1.

Provide opportunities for individual staff members and teams to develop skills for success with job duties and emerging challenges.

Objective 2.

Work with all staff to maintain and improve good communication and teamwork efforts focused on NCBVI's overall mission and goals.

Objective 3.

Complete modifications of the electronic data management system (eForce). Provide training to staff to implement the paperless client services case and data tracking system. After eForce goes 'live' continue to monitor and train so that the benefits to efficiency and effectiveness are realized.

Possible Executive Session Regarding Message from the virtual suggestion box

Commissioner Majerus moved to enter into an executive session to discuss a message from the virtual suggestion box. The executive session is needed to prevent needless injury to the reputation of an individual since the individual did not request an executive session. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion. The time was 1:15 p.m.

Commissioner Jirak made a motion to come out of executive session at 2:15 p.m. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Public Comment:

Ardis Earl inquired as to who is now supervising the North Platte District since Candy Laursen is now working out of the Lincoln office as a Counselor. Van Zandt informed her that Bob Deaton and Carlos Serván are currently supervising the North Platte District.

Focus Topics for Next Meetings:

The Commissioners reviewed the proposed time and locations of the upcoming Commission Board meetings.

Commissioner Jirak noted that in February 2008 Sherrie Manthe, who was a member of the public at the February meeting, suggested moving the May and August Commission meetings to Western part of state. In light of this request, Commissioner Jirak requested to revisit the location of the May 2009 Commission Meeting in Columbus, Nebraska. Commissioner Jirak suggested that meeting perhaps be held further West. Commissioner Majerus stated that he feels that Columbus is a good location to hold a Commission Board meeting in that this location is in the middle of the state. After discussion by the Board, it was the consensus to leave the location of the May 2009 Commission Board meeting in Columbus.

The next Quarterly Commission Board meeting is scheduled for November 22, 2008, in Lincoln. The Focus Topic will be: Working with Employers - Focus on Employment. Deputy Director Carlos Serván and the Placement Committee will host the Focus Topic. Executive Director Van Zandt requested direction on what the topic discussion should take.

The Commissioners offered the following direction:

Chairman Oltman - What do they do to work with employers? Specifically, how do they get employers interested in hiring a blind person? What types of jobs are blind people getting?

Commissioner Johnson – Would like clarification of client/counselor responsibilities and roles in job placement.

Commissioner Jirak – Would like information regarding the success of the recent completed employment seminar “Today’s Job Seekers—Tomorrow’s Leaders”. He would like to hear some feedback as to what can make such a seminar better.

Executive Director Van Zandt thanked the Commissioners for their input.

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

May 2, 2009, Columbus. It was the consensus of the Commissioners to not have a Focus Topic for the May 2009 Commission Board meeting in light of the fact that they will be discussing the evaluation of the Executive

Director at this meeting. The Topic, Supported Employment, will be moved to the August 2009 Commission Board meeting.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Final announcements:

There were no final announcements.

Adjourn:

The August 9, 2008 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Nancy Oltman

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners