

January 5, 2009

The Honorable Dave Heineman
Governor of the State of Nebraska
State Capitol, Second Floor
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

Dear Governor Heineman:

In compliance with Statute 71-8316 of 2000, the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Commission) herewith transmits its annual report for the year ending December 31, 2008.

The Commission promotes employment opportunities for blind persons by assisting them through a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation program to become productive and fully contributing members of society.

The Commission completed its Federal Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2008, and, also operates under the State Fiscal Year for budgeting, accounting and related matters. This report covers the calendar year 2008.

The Commission is governed by a Board of Commissioners (Board), which met throughout the year, dealing with several issues and learning more about the services that the Commission provides. The Board met in February, May, August, and November. During these meetings information about the programs was provided to the Board, including: Workings of the NCBVI Business Office, The Nebraska Center for the Blind, Senior Blind Specialist Position and Working with Employers/Focus on Employment. The Board also established some policies, and gave advice for some programs and procedures. The Board will continue to meet at least quarterly and work to accomplish the Mission of the Commission.

The Commission website provides information regarding its programs, as well as links to consumer organizations and information regarding blindness and blindness issues. As Executive Director, I attend statewide and local chapter meetings of consumer organizations to build a strong partnership with blind consumers. At these meetings, I both listen to consumer concerns and provide to consumers information about agency services, policies, etc. I also use email and website postings to communicate information; keeping the Board, Leaders of Consumer Organizations, and Staff apprised of changes and developments of the Commission.

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The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired remains deeply committed to its goal of assisting blind persons to become fully self-supporting, taxpaying members of society. This report delineates the ways in which we realize this goal, and a separate report on the blind vendors program is attached.

Respectfully,

Pearl Van Zandt, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

cc: NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Our Mission:
Empowering Blind Individuals, Promoting Opportunities, and Building Belief in the Blind.

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NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

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

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- Technology
- Independent Living-Older Blind (IL/OB)
- Deaf-Blind
- Business Enterprise (NBE)
- Digital Voice Newspaper Delivery System (NFB-NEWSLINE®)

The Commission utilizes three types of surveys to quantify client satisfaction and to seek input for improvement. These surveys are completed at different times. The Vocational Rehabilitation Track Survey and the Independent Living Track Survey are completed at least four months after case closure. In order to get effective feedback from our VR clients, a more comprehensive survey instrument is conducted over the phone. For clients of our residential training facility for adults, the Nebraska Center for the Blind, telephone interview surveys are conducted three months after training is completed. A Commission team worked on formulating new surveys. The new surveys are designed to provide us with better feedback and were implemented in February 2008. Another form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, which are held four times a year with the Board and also at State conventions of consumer organizations.

The NFB Mentoring program grant ended its fourth and final year. The Enrichment Foundation grant from 2008 provided assistance to older blind clients (PILBO, or Providing Independent Living for Blind Omahans). The new grant starting January 1, 2009, will help older blind individuals in the Omaha area. During our eighth Federal Fiscal Year, the Commission obtained its full federal-funding match, and also received reallotment funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

II. FINANCIAL REPORT

1.	Basic Support:		
	A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	2,880,191
	B. Aid	\$	604,511
2.	Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program		
	A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	205,738
	B. Aid	\$	28,476
3.	Supported Employment		
	A. Operations	\$	1,500
	B. Aid	\$	5,856
4.	Independent Living Part B		
	A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$	42,801
	B. Aid	\$	26,501
5.	In-Service Training Quality Grant (Operations only)	\$	46,861
6.	Social Security Reimbursement		
	A. Operations	\$	321,921
	B. Aid	\$	663
7.	PILBO		
	A. Operations	\$	1,595
	B. Aid	\$	22,593
8.	Senior Blind	\$	45,735
9.	Cash & Trust Fund Expenditures (not linked to grant or budget)	\$	6,902

III. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

The purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation program is to train blind/visually impaired individuals to enter or to retain full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market. To rehabilitate such individuals, the Commission provides training and placement in quality jobs that are appropriate to each person's capabilities, abilities, potential and informed choice. Some of the services that can be provided include: learning a positive attitude about blindness, training in the skills of blindness, blindness information to family and friends, vocational education, counseling and guidance, job training, job development, job placement and adaptive technology services. During fiscal year 2007/2008, 583 Nebraskans received services in all statuses; of which 54 consumers were competitively employed in a variety of jobs. Two individuals were successfully closed as Homemakers, which allowed them full participation in their homes, eliminating the need to rely on the nursing home/assisted-living system and allowed a blind grandparent to continue caring for her grandchildren independently. In addition, this year our staff worked with 203 multi-handicapped individuals who are also blind and 59 Transition age clients ages 13-26. The Commission successfully achieved levels required by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards and Indicators.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Commission work diligently with businesses and public entities to educate them about the potential of the blind by inviting them to a placement conference sponsored by the Commission and by providing Power-Point presentations informing them of reasonable accommodations that will not lower their expectations of productivity. Consumers were placed in a variety of jobs, including: Accountant, Archivist, Automotive Master Mechanic, Automotive Mechanic Assistant, Blood Donor Recruiter, Bookkeeper/Secretary, Braille Proofreader, Cashier, Child Care Worker/Nanny, Computer Systems Administrator, Custodian, Customer Service Representative, Document Delivery Associate, Data Information Manager, Day Care Assistant, Dining Room Attendant, Dishwasher, Factory Worker, Furniture Mover, Hand Packer and Packager, Health Services Manager, Hotel Reservationist, Janitor, Lawyer, Mental Health Counselor, Plant and System Operator, Office Assistant, Psychology - Clinical Therapist, Public Relations Manager, Ranch Manager, Rancher, Randolph-Sheppard Vendor, Receptionist, Research Tech Aide, Reservationist, Restaurant Cook, Sales Representative, Senior Project Engineer, Stocker, Teacher, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor among others.

Staff development continues as an important facet of improving the quality of services to our consumers. The entire staff continues to receive training on counseling skills, job development, job placement, and customer services which enables them to provide better services to our clients. In September 2008, VR counselors attended a joint workshop with the general agency (Nebraska Voc Rehab), on building partnerships with hospitals. Our staff also receives ongoing training on multi-handicapped issues, as individuals in this population group continue to increase. The Commission emphasizes quality competitive employment, not just the first available job, but full-time jobs that will provide consumers good wages, health insurance and the potential for upward mobility. As a result, the

clients placed in jobs will no longer need to receive social security benefits or other public support payments.

Counseling and guidance are also available to families who want to better understand blindness and to support family members who are blind or visually impaired in their pursuit of personal and vocational goals. Furthermore, the Commission educates the general public about a positive understanding of blindness and the abilities of people with visual impairments. We have the fundamental belief that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can be fully integrated into the social-economic mainstream. This philosophy is disseminated through educational programs designed to reach employers, educators, health care professionals, human service agencies, and other individuals and organizations that come into contact with the blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services also include career exploration, interest testing, and vocational planning. Assistance with tuition, books, technology, adaptive equipment, and readers are available to those pursuing vocational training. When an individual is ready for employment, job readiness, job placement and follow-up services are provided. Our counselors are constantly working on building partnerships with employers to encourage the hiring of qualified blind job seekers.

Transition services were funded by a federal grant through RSA from October 2000 through September 2005. Since fiscal year 2005 we have funded the programs with some help from the private sector and partnership with youth councils of the Workforce Investment Boards.

Experiences with employment and independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up. The Transition Program is focused on creating and supporting these opportunities across the state. The two Deputy Directors coordinate the transition services together with field staff. They work to develop positive relationships with schools, families, and employers in their communities. Work opportunities and other special programs for transition students are designed to provide social skills, work ethics, and a work history, all of which contribute significantly to eventual success in the workplace as adults.

The WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) Program, held in Lincoln for six weeks during the summer of 2008, provided work experiences for nine Nebraska students. During the first week of the program, students received intensive orientation and mobility instruction to become familiar with the UNL campus where they were housed and the near downtown area. They were then able to travel to and from work independently each day. Throughout the program, students increased their self-esteem by participating in weekly seminars involving discussions regarding work ethics and blindness issues. They had opportunities to get acquainted with adult blind role models who hold competitive jobs. These role models shared their work experiences and answered the students' questions. The Transition staff was in ongoing contact with the employers during the duration of the program to insure the success of the students in the work place. The staff also worked to educate employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of individuals who are

blind. In addition, WAGES participants had challenging activities such as hiking, horseback riding, obstacle course, high ropes, and wall climbing, among others, which were geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life. The WAGES Program partnered with Lincoln Workforce Development. The program paid the salaries of the participants from Lincoln.

The jobs students held included: Youth Program worker at the Beattie Summer Camp, worker at the Humane Society, worker at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Records Management, receptionist at the Lincoln senior center, staff assistant with the Assistive Technology Partnership, staff assistant with the Lincoln-Workforce OneStop Center, warehouse worker at Bryan-LGH, helper at the Food Bank, and helper at the Lincoln Senior Center kitchen and the UNL Selleck cafeteria.

Two other programs are "Winnerfest" and Project Independence (PI). "Winnerfest" is designed for blind teenagers from across the state to participate in two semi-annual retreats. We had 16 and 15 students participating during the two sessions, respectively. Activities were focused on the importance of mastering the skills of blindness, social skills, advocacy skills, personal achievement, goal setting, adaptive equipment, communication and other life skills. One of the most important aspects of these sessions was that the participants were exposed to successful blind role models. PI is a one week program designed for younger children, ages 7 to 15 where they are introduced to social skills and to work using blindness alternative techniques. This year, the five blind and visually impaired youngsters participated in a day program and had an excellent opportunity to learn, with the adult clients of the Nebraska Center for the Blind, from a demonstration from the Fire Department.

The Nebraska Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired is a collaborative effort among the Commission, the Department of Education, school districts, the Nebraska Center for Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, the Nebraska Department of Education Deaf-Blind Project, consumer organizations and other entities. The primary purpose is to share information with each other, advise, seek to improve relations and services, and promote an understanding of the issues and critical needs of the students involved in the education and transition process. During the 2008 calendar year the team worked on a protocol which will help to build partnerships between the transition stakeholders in the state. The document has been finalized and the Transition Team will develop a strategy on how to provide training to Commission staff and public school teachers during the 2009 calendar year.

Mentoring for Excellence, a 4-year grant, was awarded in May 2005 from the NFB-Jernigan Institute. Mentoring is a committed, supportive, and encouraging long-term relationship between two blind participants. The older, more experienced individual (mentor) provides consistent support and guidance focused on developing the character and capabilities of the young person (mentee). Mentors have been instrumental to the success of many blind adults, both personally and professionally. Mentors have provided encouragement, while challenging these individuals to seek their own solutions in order to make their dreams a reality.

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

The Louisiana Tech University – Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness conducted a four year study on the Nebraska mentoring program and wrote the following report: “The goal for the mentoring program was to increase the academic success, career aspirations, and community integration of youth who are blind. It was evident from the outset, however, that these macro changes would not be realized in the mentoring program during the life of the grant. Due to the age of youth and the nature of mentoring, it was understood that the life-changing outcomes that are expected for youth may not be measurable for years to come. In recognition of this fact, the research component of the program was designed to evaluate several proxy measures. Proxy measures are not directly linked to the ultimate outcome, but are indicative of the underlying traits that are associated with success. For the purposes of this program, the youth’s attitudes about blindness and their hope for their future were two of the variables under consideration. Using reliable instruments to measure attitudes about blindness and hope, it is believed that increases in these traits in significant levels will be predictive of their future success.

Attitudes about Blindness. The Social Responsibility about Blindness Scale (SRBS) was used to capture youth’s self-reported attitudes about blindness, and their expectations for blind people. Youth participating in this program completed the SRBS in FY 2006, 2007, and 2008. The outcome data for the Nebraska youth demonstrated significant increases in their SRBS scores over this time period. In fact, the scores increased steadily from the base in 2006 of 80.5 up to a high in 2008 of 91.44. This means an increase in SRBS scores yields a Cohen’s D effect size of 1.07. Based on typical research in the Psychology and Behavioral Sciences today, an effect of .8 is considered to be of large magnitude. The observed size of 1.07 means that youth in the Nebraska mentoring program had a very meaningful increase in their attitudes about blindness over the time they were involved in the mentoring program.

Hope. With diminished hope for one’s prospects comes diminished expectations, and likely diminished outcomes. This study used the Miller Hope Scale (MHS, which is a 40 item measure of a person’s hope for their future. It is assumed that as hope increases, so too will effort, and ultimately outcomes as well. The data demonstrated that youth in the Nebraska mentoring program had highly significant increases in their hope ($F(2, 71)=6.13$, $p<.01$). In fact, the youth’s hope scores had a baseline in 2006 of 187.97 (SD=22.79), rose to a high of 205.42 in 2007, and leveled off in 2008 at 201.77 (SD=16.33). The Cohen’s D based on the mean increases for this group is 0.873—again a significant score considering that .8 is considered to be a large effect. In practical terms, this means that in fact, youth

participating in the Nebraska mentoring program demonstrated considerable increases in their self-reported hope.

The Commission staff continues to be active in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln/Lancaster County and Greater Nebraska.

IV TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The Commission's Technology Program is the heart of adaptive technology and computer training for blind consumers in Nebraska. Computer access equipment enables individuals who are blind or visually impaired to acquire skills necessary to compete effectively in vocational training and employment. This program employs three full-time technology specialists, located in Omaha, Lincoln and North Platte. They provide assessments, training and consultation to blind consumers and employers across the state. Furthermore, technology services were provided to consumers via telephone and e-mail. Consultations were also provided to Apogees, Lincoln Senior Center, the Social Security Administration, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Saint Francis Hospital in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Library Commission, State Treasurer, Unemployment Insurance Division/Workforce Development, Bryan-LGH West, Saint Elizabeth Hospital, Hillis 66, WEST Corporation, Qwest Customer Service Center, Lancaster County, Lincoln Workforce Development, University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Chadron State College, Southeast Community College, Metro Community College, Hamilton College, Doane College, Iowa Western Community College, In fluent, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Office of the CIO, US Info, the Hyatt Hotel reservation center in Omaha, GoodWill Industries of Omaha and Grand Island, Red Cross, Cabela's, Frank House in Kearney, Methe Insurance Agency in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Labor, Lincoln Public Schools, Omaha public schools, Kearney public schools, McCook public schools, Minden High School, Grand Island public schools, Scottsbluff High School, Chase County High School, and JRW Sales Inc., among others. The technology program also provides loaner equipment to consumers and employers.

Our technology specialists utilize adaptive software for consumers' on-the-job settings. Most of the time, only small changes are required to make the blind person's job feasible and more competitive. The focus continues to be on demonstrating speech systems for Windows 2000 2003, XP, and now exploring Vista. Windows-based applications with speech and magnification are taught. Voice recognition systems are also valuable for consumers who cannot physically use a keyboard.

The Commission's technology specialists are constantly researching in order to keep up with changes in technology and to have it available to consumers and employers.

V THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the Blind is an intensive and comprehensive 8-hour a day, 5-day a week program, located in Lincoln. It provides training, designed to build self-confidence, in the techniques used by successful blind persons. This training includes instruction in areas such as independent travel using a white cane, public transportation, community access, homemaking, apartment living, typing, adaptive technology, Braille, and woodworking. Training may last up to nine months or more as students learn to apply alternative techniques to solve problems facing them in everyday life. During the training, students reside in apartments provided by the Commission. These apartments are located in downtown Lincoln.

The Center also engages in an ongoing program of public education to promote the integration of blind persons into jobs, home and community. The Center invites individuals and groups to come tour the facility to view the various features of Center training and promote the potential of blind persons. Visitors have included students from public and private schools and colleges, vision teachers from Nebraska public schools, government officials, personnel of other governmental agencies and businesses, including dignitaries from other states and countries.

Attitude and technique training are fully integrated. The attitude training motivates the student to learn and excel at alternative techniques. Learning the techniques allows the student to put his or her new attitudes of confidence into practice. In addition to training in alternative techniques, the Center provides introductory course work in the following areas:

- Employment Search
- College Preparation
- Vending Facility Management
- Cooking and Food Service
- Typing and Word Processing
- Computer Operation
- Power Machinery Use and Hand Tool Operation

Center students must be legally blind or have a condition that will eventually lead to legal blindness. They must also be capable of functioning in a training program that lasts eight hours a day, five days a week. Prior to the start of training, a tour of the facility is scheduled, followed by an interview with the Center's Director.

During the training, all students use sleepshades to eliminate the desire to rely on inadequate vision, thereby building self-confidence and helping them learn how to think and function successfully as a blind person. Once the cycle of dependence on inadequate sight is broken and the students have learned the alternative techniques by reflex, they are able to make informed decisions regarding when to use their remaining sight and when to use non-visual techniques.

Students obtain experience in traveling through airports, shopping malls, public bus transportation, shuttle services and taxicabs. They also experience traveling in more

heavily populated areas. To build students' self-confidence, Center training involves activities such as camping trips, hiking trips, swimming, and horseback riding to mention a few.

Students continue to take increased responsibility in the operation of the Center - a direct result of the Center's belief in the abilities of blind people. When Center students realize they can hold jobs, raise a family, and be valued members of the community, their lives change. Students then look forward to the future with a zest and willingness to meet life's challenges.

During this calendar year, the Center provided intensive training to 31 clients. The Center conducted 62 tours with a total of 112 individuals who were provided direct education regarding blindness from NCBVI staff. The Center continues to assist the Business Enterprise Program staff in evaluating prospective vendors. Additionally, five new Commission staff members participated in the Staff Training Program. Newly hired NCBVI employees spend four months of blindness training in the Center, thus gaining the experience first-hand that alternative techniques are effective and that blind people really can participate fully in employment and community life.

VI INDEPENDENT LIVING-OLDER BLIND PROGRAM

The Older Blind Program serves individuals age 55 or older who are legally blind or who have a progressive eye disease leading to blindness and are no longer seeking employment. The Independent Living Program serves blind individuals under the age of 55, who do not have a vocational goal. This may be due to multiple disabilities or other complicating factors. The purpose of the Independent Living-Older Blind (IL/OB) Program is to enable blind individuals to live more independently in their homes and communities. Direct services are provided to individuals in their homes and in group settings at the Commission offices. Through the Independent Living and Older Blind programs, individuals receive training and encouragement to continue living fulfilling lives with dignity and independence.

During the calendar year 2008, there were a total of 704 consumers served through the IL/OB programs. 558 individuals were 55 and over (OB program); 146 were under 55, of which 20 were under 14 year-old, and in the IL program.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired receive training in the alternative skills needed to pursue personal and vocational goals. Instruction typically begins in the home, focusing on areas of cane travel, Braille, and homemaking. Those needing more intensive instruction often move on to training in the Center.

Six point five Independent Living-Older Blind teachers serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved populations, especially those in rural areas. The teachers provide the training, guidance and counseling necessary to promote positive attitudes and encourage consumers to regain active and productive lives. Instruction for the newly blind

person may include training in the skills of blindness, such as Braille instruction; orientation and mobility, including learning to use public transportation and orientation to the individual's neighborhood and community facilities; and personal and home management skills including meal preparation, identification of coins and currency, telling time, and other activities of daily living. Our orientation teachers also provide instruction in the use of NFB-NEWSLINE[®] (a digital voice newspaper service accessed via touch-tone telephone), Talking Book and Braille Services (Braille and audio-cassette books and magazines), Radio Talking Book (a voice newspaper service accessed via closed circuit radio and television SAP), and use of the Internet and emails. Adaptive technology devices and various aids may be provided to help individuals become more self-sufficient, including a long white cane, Braille writing equipment, talking calculators, talking glucometers, Closed Circuit TVs (to read regular or large print), magnifiers, and Braille or talking watches.

Comprehensive outreach continues to provide information, consultation and training to other service providers, the general public, and agency staff. The Commission staff helps coordinate services among other providers such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, offices of the Area Agencies on Aging, Independent Living Centers, and the Veterans' Administration. Peer support groups are available statewide to provide moral support to newly blinded individuals.

New curriculum training has been implemented to enhance clients' home living skills. Clients will come for three-day sessions, and during four sessions be trained in alternative techniques as they develop their skills in a setting away from home. Training during this program is conducted using sleepshades. Sessions include: cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities (such as shopping, golfing, fishing, and visiting museums) are geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life.

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

VIII DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM

Prior to setting up the Deaf-Blind Program, services to deaf-blind consumers in the state had been limited by the constraints of time available to individual staff members who had other duties, as well as a lack of crucial knowledge and skills related to Deaf-Blindness. In 2002, the program initiated a process for identifying the deaf-blind population. To date, the number of individuals identified for the Helen Keller National Center Deaf-Blind registry has increased to 274. In 2008, the Deaf-Blind Program achieved its purpose of providing full-time services to deaf-blind consumers. This includes services to enable individuals who

are deaf-blind to live full and productive lives with dignity and self-respect. More specifically, this program strives to assist individuals who are deaf-blind to achieve full participation within their home communities through awareness, use of the American Sign Language, other alternative forms of communication, and utilization of available resources.

The Deaf-Blind Program works in partnership with Nebraska agencies serving consumers who are deaf-blind as well as staff and consumers of the Commission. This program provides services and assists individuals who are deaf-blind to obtain other services related to all aspects of employment, education, and independent living. The program staff is responsible for planning and scheduling duties in a manner conducive to smooth transition for consumers, as well as efficient use of time and effort.

Other services provided include: coordination and facilitation of a support group for consumers who are deaf-blind; demonstration and assessment of the appropriateness of augmentative technology for consumers who are deaf-blind; development of inter-agency agreements or procedures to facilitate the coordination of services to individuals who are deaf-blind; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for the purpose of increasing professional awareness, community awareness, and deaf-blind advocacy; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for interpreters working for and through the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH); and locating resources and materials for Commission staff and other agencies serving or housing consumers who are deaf-blind.

The Deaf-Blind Program will continue to identify and/or develop resources and services that will help eliminate the service gaps to consumers who experience the combination of deafness and blindness.

IX NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established over eight years ago, and continues to grow. This program is a computer-based system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers. In 2008 the Kearney Daily Hub was added and this brings our total number of Nebraskan newspaper resources to six, plus another six national papers, 256 newspapers across the country and six magazines, which are all accessible by touch-tone telephone. This enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-Newsline® when traveling throughout the United States twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses first a paper or a magazine, then the category within the paper, such as national, state, or local news, sports, area events, editorial opinions, TV listing or grocery ads. The listener immediately hears the first story of that category. They can then skip to the next story or column, replay it, jump ahead or go back in 10 second increments, raise the volume, or exit the category and choose another by pressing a single digit. Listener options also include the ability to slow down or

speed up the rate of speech, a time check key and a pause control that allows the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, the availability to spell a word, go forward or backward by paragraphs, go forward or backward by sentences, and/or to search for a subject throughout the paper by a chosen word. The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 1300 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is free of charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all 93 counties. Emailing and the internet are the most popular forms of communication today. NFB-Newsline® recognizes this and is constantly thinking of new ways to keep up to date with this fast pace world. In the works right now is companion software for the new Victor Reader Stream to make downloading papers even easier!

Along with this is a website that was created for subscribers to browse through papers and have more access to current events. Even though the computer is the chosen form of communication the phone is still easy and convenient for many blind and visually impaired persons.

WHO CAN BENEFIT? Anyone who cannot read conventional newsprint could qualify for this free service. Many seniors have lost enough vision that reading the daily newspaper is no longer possible. They can enjoy being able once again to participate actively in community affairs. Furthermore, blind children are now able to research their own civics assignments and do their homework independently. Additionally, blind persons preparing for jobs in the year 2009 and beyond cannot afford to ignore the idea of newspaper availability. NFB-Newsline® has made it possible for hundreds of blind and print impaired Nebraskans to address this compelling need, thus affording them the opportunity to become even more independent and productive. NFB-Newsline® is the only service that makes so much information available to these eligible people 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NFB-Newsline® has a speech system based on Eloquence sound which is similar to a human voice and is being used by most blind people in the country. Readers now have the option of receiving their papers via email if they have the compatible software to read it. NFB-Newsline® now offers the most accessible TV listings for the blind. NFB-Newsline® has indeed contributed to a more literate blind population and the ability to better understand and master the printed word through better access to daily newspapers and a variety of magazines.

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind proudly continues to lead the way as it forges ahead in its quest to take its rightful place on the information "super highway." In the same way the Internet has created a global village, NFB-Newsline® has opened a whole new world to its users by enabling them to achieve vocational, economic and social equality to help meet the challenges of today and the hopes and dreams of tomorrow.

X REFERRAL SERVICES

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

Nebraska Visually Impaired Peer Support (VIPS): This network of support groups, located throughout the state, offers an environment where individuals who are visually impaired can meet, learn from each other, and cope more effectively with blindness. Local peer groups usually meet monthly at accessible, convenient locations. Transportation is provided when possible. The Nebraska VIPS is a statewide organization developed by blind persons interested in helping each other while helping themselves.

The goals of VIPS are: To create and maintain a network of mutual support and peer counseling groups for persons who experience vision loss; to inform and educate blind and visually impaired Nebraskans about available services and resources; and to educate the public and public officials about the circumstances of aging and blindness.

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

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

Radio Talking Book Network (RTBN) is a statewide, closed circuit, radio reading service for those individuals who have disabilities, visual or physical, which prevent them from reading printed material. Special receivers or televisions with the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) feature are required to hear the broadcasts of RTBN. Although there are books available for the visually impaired, including the Talking Book Program of the Library of Congress, there is still a daily informational void that visually handicapped people experience. RTBN makes it possible for people to stay in touch with their community and what is going on around them. Our counselors help consumers complete applications for RTBN services and teach consumers to use the equipment.

Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE)

ACTIVITIES AND EXPENDITURES OF THE VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM

The Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE) provides individuals who are legally blind the opportunity to manage their own small businesses in vending facilities located within Federal, State, and other vending routes. Commission support to NBE vendors across the state includes: two full-time and one part-time staff members, equipment, supplies, and initial stock as well as training and assistance in skill areas essential for business management, and constant follow-up.

Since its creation by the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, the NBE Program has provided competitive employment opportunities for blind individuals served by the Commission. The NBE purpose is also to demonstrate to the general public the abilities of the blind, thereby helping to improve attitudes regarding the hiring of blind persons.

There are 20 licensed vendors, of whom two are new, who manage 65 sites and maintain more than 500 machines in Federal, State and local buildings, and rest areas on the interstate across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on three new vending opportunities. For fiscal year 2008, net profit to the vendors was \$334,497.

There are currently 61 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending food service in Nebraska that are under Business Enterprises. The locations of the NBE vending facilities are as follows.

Ground Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office Omaha
Mezzanine Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
1st Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
2nd Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
4th Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
IRS, 72nd Grover, Omaha
INS, 1717 Avenue H, Omaha
FBI, 108th Burt St, Omaha
Zorinski Federal Building, 1616 Capital Ave, Omaha
Federal Court House, 18th and Dodge, Omaha
Parks Service, 700 Riverfront Drive, Omaha
City County Building, Farnam Level Vending at 19th Farnam, Omaha
County Courthouse vending at 18th and Farnam, Omaha
700 R Street, Lincoln, (Main Post Office) Lincoln
INS, 850 S Street, Lincoln
VA, 48th and Old Cheney, Lincoln
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
INS, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE
Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Banking Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
CDP, 501 South 14th Street, Lincoln

Executive Building, 505 S. 14th Lincoln
 State Capitol, 1st Floor Vending 14th and K Street Lincoln
 State Capitol, 2nd Floor Vending, 14th and K Street Lincoln
 Vending Machines on 6 floors, State Office Building, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
 Combined with the prepared food service in the Lower Level of the State Office Building at
 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
 GSA, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
 GSA, West Second Street, Grand Island
 Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island
 Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
 Law Enforcement School, Grand Island
 National Guard Armory, North Platte
 Nebraska Western Community College, Sidney
 24 different rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Kimble on Interstate 80
 Hall County Buildings (3)
 Bulk Vending, State Office Building
 220 S. 17th Street, Lincoln, NE
 UPS Distribution Center, Sidney
 Rail Car Repair Center, Sidney
 Body Shop, Kearney
 Shizuki Plant, Ogallala
 Ferber Recycling Shop, Grand Island
 Kidney Dialysis Center, Kearney

The program continues to grow by developing more vending routes across the state, with the latest efforts in Ogallala, North Platte, Grand Island, and Omaha.

All prospective vendors are being assessed to determine what kind of skills they need to acquire such as math and basic accounting, techniques of blindness, and customer service. Business skills are being developed by taking courses at Nebraska's Community Colleges relating to such areas as human relations, supervision, business practices, basic accounting, tax law, marketing costs and inventory control.

The NBE Vendors Committee met in March, June, September, and December. A general training session was held as well as training sessions for two new vendors.

EXPENDITURES

<u>Federal</u>	<u>Set Aside</u>	<u>Other</u>
\$267,655	\$57,134	None

It is estimated that the amounts will be similar for 2009.

The Commission's Business Enterprises developed from Federal legislation known as the Randolph-Sheppard Act continues to increase employment opportunities of existing managers and trainees throughout the state.