

January 5, 2010

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, 2009.

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

The Commission has completed its Federal Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2009, and, also operates under the State Fiscal Year for budgeting, accounting and related matters.

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: Group Home Teaching session, Evaluation of the Executive Director and overall morale of commission employees, Supported Employment Services, and Nebraska Business Enterprise Program. 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 web page 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, by both listening to concerns and explain to consumers the reasons of why the agency takes a certain direction. I also continue to 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.

The Commission remains deeply committed to its goal of assisting blind persons to become fully self-supporting, tax paying members of society. This report delineates the ways in which we realize this goal, and a separate report on the Nebraska Business Enterprise Program is attached.

Respectfully,

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

Attachments

cc: NCBVI Commission Board

# NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2009



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# NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2009

## I INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (The Commission) is the State rehabilitation agency whose mission is “Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities and building belief in the blind”. The Commission 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’s misconceptions about the capability of the blind. 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
- Technology
- Independent Living-Older Blind
- Deaf-Blind
- Business Enterprise
- Digital Voice Newspaper Delivery System (NFB-NEWSLINE<sup>®</sup>)

The Commission utilizes three types of surveys to quantify client satisfaction and to seek input for improvement. These surveys are completed at different times. The Rehabilitation Track Survey and the Independent Living Survey are completed at least four months after case closure. In order to get a better feedback from our VR clients, a more comprehensive survey instrument is conducted over the phone. The Nebraska Center Survey is conducted also over the phone, three months after training is completed. Another form of phone survey is done after some of the programs, such as transition programs and Employment Conference. The last 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 Enrichment Foundation grant from last year provided assistance to older blind clients in the Omaha area (PILBO – Providing Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha). The new grant which will start in January 2010, will help the older blind in the Omaha area. During our ninth Federal Fiscal Year, the Commission was able to obtain its full federal-funding match. We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds, as well as re-allotment and ARRA funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

**II  
FINANCIAL REPORT**

<b>1. Basic Support:</b>	
<b>A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)</b>	<b>\$ 3,090,853</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 782,844</b>
<b>2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program</b>	
<b>A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)</b>	<b>\$ 242,948</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 27,142</b>
<b>3. Supported Employment</b>	
<b>A. Operations</b>	<b>\$ 0</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 29,152</b>
<b>4. Independent Living Part B</b>	
<b>A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)</b>	<b>\$ 45,022</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 22,294</b>
<b>5. In-Service Training Grant</b>	
<b>A. Operations (only)</b>	<b>\$ 15,762</b>
<b>6. Social Security Reimbursement</b>	
<b>A. Operations</b>	<b>\$ 303,311</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 407</b>
<b>7. PILBO</b>	
<b>A. Operations</b>	<b>\$ 6,252</b>
<b>B. Aid</b>	<b>\$ 26,223</b>
<b>8. Senior Blind (Operations Only)</b>	<b>\$ 83,090</b>
<b>9. Program Income (Operations Only)</b>	<b>\$ 5,170</b>

### **III VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM**

The purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is to prepare blind/visually impaired individuals to enter, retain or advance in a full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market. In rehabilitating such individuals, the Commission provides training and placement in quality jobs that are appropriate to each individual's capabilities, abilities, potentials, and informed choice. Some of the services that can be provided are: learning positive attitudes about blindness, training in the skills of blindness, self advocacy, blindness information to family and friends, vocational education, counseling and guidance, job training, job development, job placement and adaptive technology services. During federal fiscal year 2008/2009, 535 Nebraskans received services in all statuses; of which 46 consumers were competitively employed in a variety of jobs. One individual was successfully closed as Homemaker, which allowed the individual full participation in her home to continue raising her children independently. In addition, this year our staff worked with 183 multi-handicapped individuals who also happen to be blind and 141 Transition age clients ages 14-26. The Commission successfully achieved levels required by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Commission worked diligently with businesses and public entities to educate them about the potential of the blind by inviting them to two state wide employment conferences 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: Administrative Assistant, Appliance Specialist, Billing & Posting Clerk and Machine Operator, Broadcast Engineer, Call Center Operator, Certified Nursing Assistant, Childcare Worker, College Chemistry Instructor, Computer Support Specialist, Customer Service, Data Entry Leader, Early Elementary Education, Food Service Worker, Home Health Care Worker, Homemaker, Janitorial, Juvenile Diversion Coordinator, Machine Operator Supervisor, Manager - Contact Call Center, Marketing Specialist, Massage Therapist, Mathematical Science Teacher, Post-Secondary Music, Technology Technician, Nurse Manager/Supervisor, Office Clerk, Randolph-Sheppard Vendor, Registered Nurse, Retail Sales Person, Sales Representative, Sales Representative-Insurance, Self-Employed Vendor, Service Coordinator, Special Education Teacher, Senior Customer Service Representative, Telemarketer, Tractor Repair/Farm Equipment Repair Self-Employment, and Trailer Technician.

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, dealing with other mental and physical disabilities, and customer services which enables them to provide good services to our clients. 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 welfare.

The Commission also launched, during calendar year 2009, a new web-based case management system which allows counselors do the VR paperwork from the clients' houses or where ever

they need to do it. This new system is accessible to commission staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week and it is reducing the need of hard copies in a considerable way, saving time and money for the agency. This system is also helping us to provide better quality control as it will let the counselors know when there is a dead-line, keep track of outcomes from certain programs, etc.

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 promotes a positive understanding to the general public of blindness and the abilities of people who are blind. We know that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can be fully integrated into the social and economic mainstream. This philosophy is disseminated through educational programs designed to reach businesses/employers, educators, health care professionals, human services agencies, and other individuals and organizations that come into contact with the blind.

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

Transition services were funded by a federal grant through RSA from October 2000 through September 2005. Since then we have funded the programs with some help from the private sector and partnership with workforce youth councils. In the 2009 calendar year we used ARRA funds and some private donations to conduct transition from school to work services.

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

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

were geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life. The WAGES Program partnered with Lincoln Workforce Development, and they paid the salaries of most of the participants.

The jobs students held included: helper at the UNL Selleck cafeteria, worker at the Humane Society, worker at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Records Management, helper at the Lincoln Sub Urban Mini Suites hotel cleaning department, staff assistant with the Assistive Technology Partnership, Helper at Pioneers Park, staff assistant with the Lincoln-Workforce OneStop Center, Data entry helper with the Mexican American Commission, Cook helper at El Rancho Restaurant, Braille proof reader at the Christian Records, helper at the Canine Design, assistant at the State Capitol Tour Division, helper at the KZUM radio station, helper at the Malone Community Center, and helper at the Family Service day-care.

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 20 and 18 students participating during the two sessions, respectively. Activities were focused on technology and job seeking skills and some of the issues discussed were the importance of mastering the skills of blindness, social skills, advocacy skills, personal achievement, goal setting, adaptive equipment, communication and other life skills. One of the most important aspects of these sessions was that the participants were exposed to successful blind role models. PI is a one week program designed for younger children, ages 7 to 15 where they are introduced to social skills and to work using blindness alternative techniques. This year, the seven blind and visually impaired youngsters participated in a day program and had an excellent opportunity to learn with the adult participants from the orientation center a demonstration from the Fire Department. They even got to put out a fire using a Fire Extinguisher.

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 2009 calendar year the team worked on a protocol which is helping to build partnerships between the transition stakeholders in the state. The document has been finalized and the transition team provided training to Commission staff and teachers from the public schools during the 2009 calendar year.

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 statewide workshops, telephone and e-mail. Consultations were also provided to Apogee call center, the Social Security Administration, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Saint Francis Hospital in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Nebraska Library Commission, Bryan LGH West, Saint Elizabeth Hospital, Hillis 66, WEST Corporation, Qwest Customer Service Center, Lancaster County, Lincoln Workforce Development, Mexican American Commission, Medigraphix, Calvary Methodist Church, 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, InFluent, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Office of the CIO, US Info, ConAgra Food, the Hyatt Hotel reservation center in Omaha, GoodWill Industries of Omaha and Grand Island, Red Cross, Cabela's, Frank House in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Labor, Lincoln Public Schools, Omaha public schools, Minden High School, North Platte Public Schools, Alliance Public Schools, Region 1 Office of Human Development in Sidney, Grand Island public schools, Scottsbluff 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, Vista, and now exploring Windows 2007. 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 continuously 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 a six to nine month comprehensive program which provides highly effective pre-vocational rehabilitation training to blind individuals. The training provided is based on the techniques utilized by highly successful blind persons, and is designed to build confidence. This includes training in the alternative skills of blindness, such as Braille, communications, technology, cane travel, basic wood-working and home repair, home management, apartment living, philosophical counseling, and vocational development and placement. On average, 92% of individuals graduating from the Nebraska Center for the blind, achieve their vocational goals, and the majority of these graduates obtains and maintains competitive employment.

During training clients stay in individual furnished efficiency apartments which are located in downtown Lincoln. The cost of the training is \$4,725.00 per month; this includes the cost of Center training and materials, apartment rent, utilities, local telephone service, and transportation expenses, grocery and activity costs. Center clients are only responsible for certain personal expenses, such as cable television, individual internet service in the apartment, Cab fares to and from medical appointments, or those related to personal shopping, and the costs related to a shop project that exceeds the budgeted amount. The goal of the program is to provide pre-vocational training to blind clients, without creating a financial burden for them.

When clients finish our program we expect them to live independently and to obtain competitive employment. For this reason, the primary focus of training for blind adults at the Nebraska Center for the Blind, addresses individual attitudes regarding oneself, such as one's abilities, one's potential, and one's place in society. Alternative skills training focuses on acquiring and mastering the blindness-specific methods necessary for functioning competitively in performing all major life tasks. Clients learn to effectively and appropriately confront the attitudes held by the public toward the blind. Career exploration and development is provided, to set aside the myths and misconceptions regarding blindness. There is also an emphasis on the critical importance of giving back to the community, in changing the negative beliefs held by both the general public and individual blind persons themselves.

Various approaches are used to accomplish these five goals of the Center training. Individual and group instruction, as well as independent learning experiences, are utilized in the acquisition of blindness-related skills, employing the tried and true method of structured discovery learning. During the training, all clients use sleep-shades to eliminate the desire to rely on inadequate vision, thereby building self-confidence and helping them learn how to think and function successfully as a blind person. Once the cycle of dependence upon inadequate vision has been overcome, and the clients have learned to truly rely upon the alternative techniques, they are able to make informed decisions regarding when to use their remaining vision.

These instructional approaches and experiences equip individuals with the ability to communicate, travel independently, manage household duties, and function competitively in the work place. We provide individual philosophical counseling to help clients successfully confront societal attitudes. We schedule regular philosophy classes to educate clients about specific experiences that can be anticipated, career related subjects, and introduction of novel alternatives

for handling frequently experienced circumstances and events. Woodworking class provides an opportunity to challenge negative beliefs regarding the abilities of blind persons, refine problem solving skills, and build confidence. Living independently in an actual apartment brings the real world challenges of daily life to the skills of blindness being developed in the training environment, and helps solidify the individual's sense of self-sufficiency.

We also initiate and encourage a variety of classroom based activities as well as off-site activities. Such activities have included pumpkin carving, the preparation of a full Thanksgiving meal at the Center, and collecting food items for the "Food Drive". Other experiences include non-visual tours of museums, trips to the local water park, and community service and other volunteer efforts.

All experiences provided by the Center, whether crafted from years of experience, or the result of a spontaneous response, are designed to incorporate and engage all of the elements previously outlined, which lead clients toward achieving the five goals of rehabilitation promoted at the Nebraska Center for the Blind. Clients are expected to take increased responsibility in their own training, as well as the operation of the Center during the course of their training, which is a direct result of the Center's belief in the abilities of blind people. When Center clients realize they can hold jobs, raise a family, and be valued members of the community, their lives change. Clients then look forward to the future with a confidence and determination to meet life's challenges.

In the course of encountering both classroom and real world experiences, clients are not only challenged to expand their own levels of functional competency, but they also have the opportunity to learn firsthand more effective approaches for interacting with the normally sighted public. This provides them with the opportunity to develop the confidence needed to effectively respond to the all too prevalent negative attitudes, discrimination, and low expectations held by society.

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 from other governmental agencies, and businesses.

Our clients start their application process in the field, where they receive initial alternative skills training before entering the center. Center clients must be legally blind or have a condition that will eventually lead to legal blindness. They must also be capable of functioning in an intensive training program. Prior to the start of training, a tour of the facility is scheduled, followed by an interview with the Center's Director. Professional Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and instructors working in the field will bring the potential client to the Center for their first tour and perhaps a three-day stay. During the three-day stay, clients are mentored by senior center clients, and receive training under sleep shades, 8 hours a day. This provides them with a firsthand center training experience, promoting a truly informed choice. Of those clients participating in a "Three-Day Stay" experience, ninety-six per cent make the decision to return for the full course of training.

The Eligibility for Center training is not determined through a formal “evaluation” of clients conducted by the Center or field staff, rather the decision to attend the Nebraska Center for the Blind is made by the consumers themselves, with the assistance of the field and Center staff, based upon informed choice. Clients choosing to attend The Nebraska Center for the Blind are fully aware that the training is an intensive, five day per week, eight hour a day program, based upon high expectations, demands a true commitment to learning, and requires each of them to attend all major areas of the center program. Day-clients are rarely accepted, and such exceptions are made only in situations where health, employment, or family wellbeing may be compromised by full-time attendance.

Our Center apartments are located in downtown Lincoln, and require the clients to commute to the Center by city bus daily. Each day, Monday through Thursday, clients are scheduled for a one hour Braille class, as well as one hour communications class, primarily focused on computer skills, but also providing training in other critical communication skills, such as the use of a telephone, various types of office equipment, and handwriting. Clients also receive two hours of cane travel, two hours of home management, and two hours of shop each day, Monday through Thursday. Fridays, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. clients are provided with individual philosophical counseling, and assistance with resolving other issues that may arise during their training. Then from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon clients attend a mandatory philosophy class that focuses on the issues related to blindness. Following this, from 12:30 pm through 2:30 pm Center clients are required to attend a vocational seminar which is conducted for both Center clients and other agency clients. From 2:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., staff members attend a team meeting, conduct client staffings, and complete paperwork, while clients work on independent assignments, usually at the apartments.

Each month we have one or two required activities in the Center facility, or off-site. These may includes activities such as visiting a museum, cooking a Thanksgiving dinner for all of the Center clients, Lincoln staff and guests, and many other activities. In the same manner as sleep-shades are required from 8:00am to 5:00 pm for all Center classes, they are likewise used during Center activities. The only exception is during lunch breaks. Our Center Apartment Resource Counselor provides training and some activities three evenings a week, and activities, as well as some additional training, every other weekend. While the training provided by the Apartment Resource counselor are mandatory and require the use of sleep-shades, The evening and weekend training and activities and do not require the use of sleep-shades. It is during these times that clients can learn how to best use any partial vision and explore when their remaining vision does and does not work effectively for them.

Center staff consists of 7 full-time blindness professionals and one part-time person who serves as our Diabetic Alternatives Counselor.

Over the last five years, we have averaged twelve clients at any given time, with a waiting list of five to seven clients. This average does not include three-day stays or staff trainees. All newly hired staff members are required to go through Center training for a period of 600 hours, eight hours a day, using sleep-shades, whether blind or sighted. The average training period in the Center for clients, is six to nine months.

During this calendar year, the Center provided intensive training to 26 clients. Additionally, ten new Commission staff members participated in the Staff Training Program (this includes the seven Summer temporary employees). The Center also conducted 59 tours with a total of 196 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.

## 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. The Independent Living Program serves blind individuals under the age of 55. The purpose of the Independent Living-Older Blind (IL/OB) Program is to enable blind individuals to live more independently in their homes and communities. Direct services are provided to individuals in their homes and/or group settings at the Commission office. Through the Independent Living and Older Blind programs, individuals receive training and encouragement to continue living fulfilling lives with dignity and independence.

During the 2009 Federal fiscal year, there were a total of 756 consumers served through the IL/OB programs. 626 individuals were 55 and over (OB program) while 130 were under 55, of which 23 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.

Eight Independent Living-Older Blind teachers serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved populations, especially those in rural areas. The teachers provide the training, guidance and counseling necessary to promote positive attitudes and encourage consumers to regain active and productive lives. Instruction for the newly blind person may include training in the skills of blindness, such as Braille instruction; orientation and mobility, including learning to use public transportation and orientation to the individual's neighborhood and community facilities; and personal and home management skills including meal preparation, identification of coins and currency, telling time, and other activities of daily living. Our orientation teachers also provide instruction in the use of NFB-NEWSLINE<sup>®</sup> (a digital voice newspaper service accessed via touch-tone telephone), Talking Book and Braille Services (Braille and audio-cassette books and magazines), Radio Talking Book (a voice newspaper service accessed via closed circuit radio and television SAP), and use of the Internet and emails. Assistive technology devices and various aids may be provided to help individuals become more self-sufficient, including a long white cane, Braille writing equipment, talking calculators, talking glucometers, Closed Circuit TVs (to read regular or large print), magnifiers, and Braille or talking watches.

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

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

solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities (such as shopping, golfing, fishing, and visiting museums) are geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life.

As reported last year, The National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) worked in a partnership with the Commission to get an increase from the unicameral for services for the senior blind. As a result, the unicameral increased the budget of the Commission by \$75,000 to hire a senior blind coordinator. The coordinator was hired in October 2007 and 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. The Commission was able to compile data illustrating how the state can save money if our agency works with blind seniors instead of them ending up in nursing homes. As a result, the Commission and the NFBN approached the unicameral again and for FY 2010, our agency was provided an additional \$55,000 for a new Orientation Counselor position in Omaha. Because of the ARRA funds available also to this program, the Commission is working on putting together a state wide conference which will take place in Grand Island on May 5 and 6.

## **VII DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM**

Prior to setting up the Deaf-Blind Program, services to deaf-blind consumers in the state had been limited by the constraints of time available to individual staff members who had other duties. In 2002, the program initiated a process for identifying the deaf-blind population. To date, the number of individuals identified for the Helen Keller National Center Deaf-Blind registry has increased to 289, from which 157 are females and 132 are males. In 2009, 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 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.

## **VIII** **NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND**

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska over nine 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, and national magazines. There is a total of six Nebraskan newspaper resources, plus another six national papers, 256 newspapers across the country and six magazines which are accessible by touch-tone telephone. This also enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-Newsline® when traveling throughout the United States twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses first a paper or a magazine, then the category within the paper, such as national, state, or local news, sports, area events, editorial opinions, TV listing or grocery ads. The listener immediately hears the first story of that category. They can then skip to the next story or column, replay it, jump ahead or go back in 10 second increments, raise the volume, or exit the category and choose another by pressing a single digit. Listener options also include the ability to slow down or speed up the rate of speech, a special time check key and a pause control that allows the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, the availability to spell a word, go forward or backward by paragraphs, go forward or backward by sentences, and/or to search for a subject throughout the paper by a chosen word. The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 1399 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is available to qualify readers 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. Now there is a companion software for the new digital “talking book” 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. The NFB national office will start two new initiatives by the beginning of 2010, Key Stream and Podable News. Key stream will allow subscribers to call Newsline® through their home computer with no special software required. Subscribers will just simply use the number pad on the computer just as if using the number pad on a phone. Podable News gives subscribers the ability to create their own papers. Using a Pod Catcher, particular articles can be pulled from certain newspapers and downloaded to an MP3 player. The two initiatives that were launched last spring, Web News on Demand and NFB-Newsline® in Your Pocket, are being used extensively by subscribers. Even though the computer is the chosen form of communication the phone is still easy and convenient for many blind/visually impaired.

**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 2010 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<sup>®</sup> is the only service that makes so much information available to these eligible people 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NFB-Newsline<sup>®</sup> 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. NFB-Newsline<sup>®</sup> 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<sup>®</sup> 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<sup>®</sup> 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.

## **IX 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.

## **INFORMATION REGARDING ACTIVITIES AND EXPENDITURES OF THE VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM**

### **Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE)**

The 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 77 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 3 new vending opportunities. For fiscal year 2009, net profit to the vendors was \$317,213.

There are currently 77 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  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha  
IRS, 72<sup>nd</sup> Grover, Omaha  
INS, 1717 Avenue H, Omaha  
FBI, 108<sup>th</sup> Burt St, Omaha  
Zorinski Federal Building, 1616 Capital Ave, Omaha  
Federal Court House, 18<sup>th</sup> and Dodge, Omaha  
Parks Service, 700 Riverfront Drive, Omaha  
City County Building, Farnam Level Vending at 19<sup>th</sup> Farnam, Omaha  
County Courthouse vending at 18<sup>th</sup> and Farnam, Omaha  
700 R Street, Lincoln, (Main Post Office) Lincoln  
INS, 850 S Street, Lincoln  
VA, 48<sup>th</sup> and Old Cheney, Lincoln  
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12<sup>th</sup> and N Streets, Lincoln  
INS, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE  
Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12<sup>th</sup> and N Streets, Lincoln  
Banking Commission at the Atrium, 12<sup>th</sup> and N Streets, Lincoln  
CDP, 501 South 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln  
Executive Building, 505 S. 14<sup>th</sup> Lincoln

State Capitol, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Vending 14<sup>th</sup> and K Street Lincoln  
State Capitol, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Vending, 14<sup>th</sup> and K Street Lincoln  
Vending Machines on 6 floors of the 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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  
22 different rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Kimble on Interstate 80  
Hall County Buildings (3)  
Bulk Vending, State Office Building  
220 S. 17<sup>th</sup> 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  
Lincoln Census Bureau  
Omaha Census Bureau  
North Platte Census Bureau  
Allied Tire Service  
Grand Island Parks and Recreation  
Wilson's Truck Repair  
DuVal Diesel Service  
Zorinski Building  
Grease Monkey, North Platte  
Bosselman's Truck Stop North Platte  
Butch's Auto  
Gibbon Nursing Home  
Ashland Military Facility

The program continues to grow by developing more vending routes across the state, with the latest efforts in Ashland, North Platte, Lincoln, 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 three new vendors.

**EXPENDITURES**

<u>Federal</u>	<u>Set Aside</u>	<u>Other</u>
\$261,104	\$57,685	None

It is estimated that the amounts will be similar for 2010.

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.