

# NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

February 6, 2010; 9:00 a.m.

Omaha, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Deaf Blind consumers and staff prepared and will serve lunch. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting.

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

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made.

Commissioners present: Darrell Walla, Omaha; Jim Jirak, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind, Omaha; Julie Johnson, Chairperson, York; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind, Lincoln; and Nancy Oltman, Hastings.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director-VR, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-IL, Lincoln; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor, Omaha; Carol Jenkins, VR Counselor, Omaha; Robert Newman, VR Counselor, Omaha; Cheryl Poff, Orientation Counselor, Omaha; Elaine Kavulak, Orientation Counselor, Omaha; and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln.

Deaf-Blind Consumers Present: Randy Swanson, Patricia Swanson, Robert Mac Knight, Ron Ocken, Matt Pettit. Family members: John and Calvert Mac Knight and Vera Pettit. Interpreters: Kris Hahn, Peter Seiler, Karen Potter-Maxwell, Maggie Corrigan, Cindy Skiles (SSP), and Lori \* (SSP).

Public Present: Hubert Paulson; Barb Epworth, Chapter Representative for ACB, Omaha; Glennie Weiland, Vice President of ACB of Nebraska, Omaha; Howard Compton, American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, State Treasurer; Janis Compton, member of ACB-N, Omaha; Merna Hansen, Juniata; Mark Bulger, Omaha; Josephine Genit, Omaha; and Dan Bird, Plattsmouth.

Chairman Johnson noted that Eric Stueckrath from Outlook Nebraska (ONI) will be attending the meeting at 10:30 a.m.; and therefore, the agenda will be rearranged to accommodate this. The Report from Nancy Flearl and Carlos Servan in regard to visit with Outlook Nebraska was moved to 10:25 a.m. and the Presentation from Outlook Nebraska was moved to 10:30 a.m. The Executive Director Report and the Report from the Chairman was moved to the afternoon.

## Minutes of the November 21, 2009 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Oltman moved to approve the Minutes of the November 21, 2009 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

### Budget Update

Van Zandt reported that the Special Session of the Legislature has concluded. Across the board cuts have been made. The cut for agencies is 2.5% for the current fiscal year and 5% for State Fiscal year 2010/2011. NCBVI did receive some extra federal money this year. Every year agencies have a chance to request reallocation funds from the federal government. This year NCBVI received \$600,000. NCBVI will be able to manage the cuts this year. In November the Legislature took back some of the State General fund monies that they had earlier this year voted to allow agencies to carry over from one biennium to the next. The cuts for this year compute to \$29,000 and just under \$50,000 for next year. NCBVI can manage the cuts for a short term. The stimulus funds and social security reimbursements also gave NCBVI some extra money.

The Governor put a freeze on salary increases for top level management. The state employees' labor union, NAPE, considered whether or not to follow suit. Yesterday NAPE announced that they will not. Employees covered by the Labor Contract will receive raises this year, per the negotiated contract.

Chairman Johnson noted that NCBVI has several staff who may retire soon and she asked how this will affect the budget. Van Zandt stated that retirements could affect the budget since staff receives a portion of their leave paid to them. If several retirements requiring big payouts happened at the same time, NCBVI would need to wait to rehire for the positions.

Chairman Johnson inquired as to if NCBVI plans for a furlough. Van Zandt stated that a furlough does not need to happen at the present. However, if the budget gets tighter, the agency will do a voluntary furlough. This would be the first step.

#### DAS/NIS Update

It was noted that DAS stands for Department of Administrative Services and NIS is an electronic system that State agencies use for purposes such as accounting, fixed assets and payroll.

#### NIS

An updated version of NIS was to come out in early January, but only parts of it actually came out. The big question with updates is always if it will work with JAWS (which also keeps being updated with new versions). The Office of the CIO has a blind individual who tests NIS with JAWS on an ongoing basis. Van Zandt reported that she has not heard of problems from staff recently about NIS. It was noted that NIS is not real easy for staff to use visually either. When we assess problems, we have to determine if it is accessibility or usability, difficulty that anyone has with NIS because they are not frequent users of the system.

DAS

Van Zandt noted that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is the State Licensing Agency operating per the Randolph-Sheppard Act, as amended, 20 USC 107 et seq., and State of Nebraska Statute §71-8611. NCBVI is concerned about a series of occurrences which have threatened our operation of contracts on State of Nebraska property in Lincoln, and the livelihood of the blind managers who operate the facilities.

A few years ago, the Nebraska Legislature passed and the Governor signed legislation that gives priority to blind individuals to vending facilities on state property, when the bids are comparable to other bids. According to the intent of the law, blind vendors should have preference to run cafeterias or/and snack machines in state owned buildings. This action was prompted by the fact that blind people have the highest unemployment rate in the country. The State of Nebraska determined that it should participate in the struggle to change this. Recent actions by the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services have established a pattern contrary to that intent.

Prior to July 2008, NCBVI had contracts with Building Division to operate vending units and the NSOB Lower Level lunch room for three years; in 2008 it became a one-year contract. Termination was to be executed, if need be, with 90 days notice. As of July 2009, we were informed that our contracts would be extended on a month to month basis only.

In July and August, 2009, NCBVI heard of changes in Building Division actions but had no formal notice or informal conversation.

NCBVI requested a meeting with Building Division staff and said meeting was held in August. NCBVI asked if Building Division had any kind of dissatisfaction or complaints with our performance and services. The answer was no, services were satisfactory. We were informed that a request for bids was in the works, that the contracting process was in accordance with policy, and that DAS Materiel/Purchasing was in charge. We certainly understand the bid process, yet the process seems to change and we are no closer to a workable solution.

NCBVI fully cooperated with the Contract Request for Bids (RFB) process of DAS Purchasing. We did view the other bids, in accordance with proper procedure. Our bids were actually comparable to the others, except for the new operation of Group B – Concessions, in NSOB. Our bid for Group B was not comparable to the Scooters bid, so we did not contest the awarding of that contract.

All other Groups in that RFB were delayed; then all bids were summarily rejected as of January 14, 2010. There was no reason provided as to why the bids were rejected, nor why the bidding process was closed. To this day no contract has been offered the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) for vending services in NSOB or the other State of Nebraska buildings in Lincoln.

The bid process had established that items for sale specified on the bid were not to be duplicated or changed. When we inquired about the First Floor concessions now serving sandwiches and other lunch items, we received a letter from DAS stating that the bid process did allow for menu flexibility during the first six months of the contract.

Our understanding of such flexibility is that it would still be within the scope of the original bid; for example, just different kinds of pastries or drinks rather than adding products which make the 'concessions' stand a provider of lunch-type products.

Another problem is not related to the RFB, but has been an issue for several years now. It has been conveyed to our unit manager that advertising is not allowed. However, the Main Street Café in the Capitol and Scooters advertise on bulletin boards throughout the NSOB building. We wanted to post ads for our NSOB lunchroom on other floors of NSOB and at the State Capitol. We were told that was absolutely not allowed. The building directory on the first floor of the Nebraska State Office Building shows where everything is located in the building, but does not list the lower level cafeteria. This is even more important now that Scooters is located on first floor where people coming and going clearly see it. This needs to be corrected to show that our cafeteria is located in the lower level, serving breakfast and lunch items.

Pricing of items in the lunchroom have undergone scrutiny by various building division staff members none of which will take responsibility for offering feedback. Our current contract provides that we, the Vendor, must request approval for price increases or product changes. The Owner is required to respond within ten (10) working days upon receipt of a request for price increase from Vendor to either approve or disapprove said request. We sent such a request on January 8, 2010. After that, there were requests for monthly profit and loss statements which had been sent previously to Building Division. We did provide the documents again, but we still do not have an answer to our request.

There are many issues which we, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, cannot allow to continue.

Therefore, a meeting has been requested with the Director of Administrative Services to discuss these issues.

NFB-Newsline® Update

Jamie Forbis emailed the NFB-Newsline® Update to the Board members, Pearl Van Zandt and Kathy Stephens. The Report is as follows:

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®

February 1, 2010

By

Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to 2010! With the New Year come new voices, new features and new stats!

A while back subscribers were asked to evaluate new voices and choose the voices they liked the best. The two most popular voices among subscribers are now available by pressing 8 when reading an article. The male voice of Paul and the female voice of Kate provide a more human like reading voice to listen to while reading the paper. Paul is especially nice for seniors or subscribers that are hard of hearing. Paul will be the default voice for all new subscribers, but can be changed at any time by pressing 8 and cycling through the voice choices. Speed and pitch can still be controlled with the new voices just as with Eloquence.

Listing subscribers email addresses on the application for NFB-Newsline® is very important to keep the subscriber up to date on Newsline events. Recently NFB-Newsline® has added a new feature that makes the email address even more important. When a subscriber reads an article on NFB-Newsline® that is of great interest to them all; the subscriber needs to do is press the pound sign and the the number 9 and that article will be emailed to the address on file. I hope to get more email addresses from subscribers so they can enjoy this new feature.

Last year NFB-Newsline® created the NFB-Newsline® In Your Pocket software for users of Victor Reader Streams.

This software allows subscribers to download their favorite publications into their Victor Reader Stream. This software is now compatible with the GW Micro BookSense; making reading on the go even easier!

Something else that's now easier than ever is the availability of new stats for state coordinators. Coordinators now have access to how many subscribers were added each month and whether the subscriber was added by the state coordinator or another agency/organization such as the Talking Book and Braille Library. Besides the normal stats as to how many calls were made, how long each call lasted and the total minutes used coordinators can now tell how many subscribers use the regional number versus the toll-free number, how many subscribers accessed Newsline on the web, how many subscribers use the In Your Pocket software and how many subscribers had papers emailed to them. However, the section that told coordinators the least popular and most popular days of the month is no longer available. Guess I'll have to find some new fun facts to pass along. For now; here are the stats for the last three months.

In November 14 new subscribers were added to NFB-Newsline®. Two subscribers were added by TBBS and the remaining twelve were added by me. The phone usage is as follows: 1,028 calls were made for a total of 21,361 minutes used. The average call lasted 2092 minutes and 57.36% of the calls were made using the regional number. Also in November 42 subscribers used Newsline via the web, 22 used the NFB-Newsline® In Your Pocket software and subscribers received 1,216 emails with Newsline content.

In December 10 new subscribers were added by me. 1,140 calls were made to Newsline for a total of 19,707 minutes. Calls lasted on average 17.29 minutes and 48.42% of the calls were made using the regional number.

61 subscribers accessed NFB-Newsline® via the web, 14 used the NFB-Newsline® In Your Pocket software and 1,328 emails were received by subscribers.

January's numbers are down a bit compared to the other two months. In January only two new subscribers were added to the system in Nebraska. Subscribers called NFB-Newsline® 1,040 times for a total of 17,783 minutes used. The average call lasted 17.10 minutes and 56.72% of the calls made in January were through the regional number. 52 subscribers accessed Newsline on the web, 10 used the NFB-Newsline® In Your Pocket software, and 1,473 emails were received.

As of February 1, 2010 NFB-Newsline® Nebraska has 1,384 subscribers which is up from 123 this time last year. As the subscriber base continues to grow and the availability of new features continues it's so important to keep subscribers up-to-date and knowledgeable about the new items. I recently wrote an article for the news letter of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska and hope to submit articles for other publications. As always if you know of an event that you'd like me to speak at or to provide promotional materials please let me know. Until next time keep reading and discovering all the wonderful features of NFB-Newsline®!

## Client Assistance Program – Complaints or Issues

There were no CAP cases during this past quarter.

### Public Comment

Glennie Weiland – Glennie inquired about the Randolph-Sheppard Act applying to the State Office Building.

Van Zandt reported that there is new language in the State law which gives a preference to the State agency when bids are comparable. NCBVI wanted the State law to make it a priority as in Federal law, but that did not happen.

Howard Compton – Howard asked how that State of Nebraska can write a law with loopholes to discourage or deny preference to NCBVI which is contrary to Federal law.

Van Zandt noted that Federal law relates to Federal buildings. The Randolph-Sheppard Act does not cover State buildings.

Bob Deaton – Bob noted that the language in the State law is not strong as it is in the Federal law. The State law establishes a preference; not a priority.

A break was taken at 10:00 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10:18 a.m.

## Report from Nancy Flearl and Carlos Servan in Regard to Visit with Outlook Nebraska

Carlos Serván noted that he previously emailed to the commissioners a short report in regards to his visit to Outlook Nebraska. Carlos summarized his report and stated that they were at Outlook Nebraska for approximately two hours, but they were not invited to take a tour. Carlos noted that he did not ask to take a tour either. He and Nancy were invited to take a tour in the future. Carlos stated that they did not talk to any employees because they did not feel it was their role to do so. During the two hours they mostly talked about an email he had sent to Pearl Van Zandt and the Board. The conversation started with the discussion of case closures being unsuccessful when a client is placed at Outlook Nebraska. This is an internal process because RSA rules state that in order to be a successful closure the client must be in integrated employment. At Outlook Nebraska, 70 to 80 percent of the staff is to be blind, in order to obtain the federal contracts. They agreed to disagree on this topic. NCBVI will reword the letter that goes to the client in order that it contains no negative language.

Carlos noted that NCBVI does not discourage people from working at Outlook Nebraska. Clients have their right to make an informed choice. NCBVI hears good and bad things about working at Outlook Nebraska and other businesses. NCBVI has high expectations for clients, but in the end clients can choose.

Nancy Flearl noted that some individuals have multiple disabilities. NCBVI is trying to open the minds of employers.

We are working with Outlook Nebraska to show other employers how individuals with multiple disabilities can work in manufacturing and production.

Nancy noted that there is an individual who is currently working at Outlook Nebraska in the Administrative office. This was closed as successful because it is integrated employment. Employees who are unhappy with their job at Outlook Nebraska should work from within Outlook Nebraska to get their issues resolved.

Presentation from Outlook Nebraska

Eric Stueckrath thanked everyone for the opportunity to come to the meeting today. Eric noted that he has been the Executive Director at Outlook Nebraska since 2001.

Eric took some time to reflect what is happening at Outlook Nebraska. Eric stated that Outlook Nebraska had a good year in that it grew 4.1 million in revenues. While they made more money on the front end they spent more money on the back end in order to make that possible.

In February 2008, Outlook became a true company. This was a great change. During this year they had to break in used equipment which caused for a struggle in the production business. Outlook Nebraska produces tissues and towels and markets them to the Federal Government. Between October and November 2008 they actually started to see profit. They have not had a non-profitable month since October 2008. This profit allowed them to make investments in Outlook Nebraska.

The investments they made allowed for their production to increase substantially and it was a phenomenal effort that took place.

In 2010 Outlook Nebraska will have a number of positions opening up. Eric noted that he will be hiring an executive assistant for management staff. They have an education and training center that is stocked with computers that have JAWS and Zoom Text on them. They are also looking at purchasing other adaptive technology to use as a showcase.

During 2010 Outlook Nebraska will be purchasing some new machines to replace old ones. This gives them the opportunity to take a machine and adapt it to someone who is blind or has low vision. Outlook Nebraska relies on outside companies to develop the software to make the machines accessible.

Eric reported that Outlook Nebraska currently has a stack of applicants for jobs and this continues to grow with the help of NCBVI, The Iowa Department for the Blind, Lions Club, etc.

Eric noted that Carlos Serván and Nancy Flearl met with him in early December and they talked about working with multiple disabled persons. Eric stated that economics is one of their biggest challenges. The key for them is to find more businesses that could rely on their services.

Carlos Servan asked the number of hours the individuals in production work and how many of them work part time because of the limitations with Social Security income. Carlos further asked how much per hour the production employees make.

Eric noted that the entry level wage on the production floor is \$9 per hour for packaging workers. Machine operators and rewinding operators make between \$11 and \$13 per hour. Team leads make \$15 to \$17 per hour.

Carlos inquired as to how many employees earning \$9 per hour want to work only part time because of the limitations with the social security income.

Eric noted that there are two different mentalities of employees. Some want to work all they can because they value getting out of the house and being a part of the organization. Then there are others who maximize their hourly wage so they can hit their limit quicker and do not have to work as many hours.

Carlos noted that NCBVI works with clients in the field and explain to them how they can work full-time even if they make \$10 per hour. Eric invited Carlos to contact Mark at Outlook Nebraska to discuss claiming work expenses and maximizing hours.

Eric noted that February 7 is Outlook Nebraska's 10 year anniversary. In that regard they are planning several outreach events in order to elevate the awareness of their business. Outlook Nebraska has a vision for growth.

Commissioner Jirak inquired as to what Mark has done with the sensitivity training information that he forwarded to him. Eric stated that as an organization they have done a program called "Leaders at All Levels" that was sponsored by National Industries for the Blind. Outlook Nebraska will be conducting continuing education at all levels.

## Public Comment

Janis Compton – Janis stated that it sounds like ONI (Outlook Nebraska) is planning an expansion as part of its long term goals. Janis inquired as to if ONI is looking at diversification of product or just expanding on the product they are currently marketing.

Eric stated that they are looking at both, as diversification is a necessity.

Mike Hansen – Mike noted that he was asked to share a letter that was written by Amy Buresh, President of NFB – Nebraska. Mike read the letter into the record and it is posted below.

Dear Commission Board, Dr. Van Zandt, Mr. Servan and Mr. Deaton,

I am unable to attend the meeting in person and ask that these comments be shared during public comment immediately following the presentation by your staff and Outlook Nebraska.

As president of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, the oldest and largest group of the blind in this state, speaking for ourselves, I write to you to express continued concern about Outlook Nebraska Inc.

The NFB of Nebraska filed an EEOC charge on behalf of blind workers which is still being investigated. We do not feel that there is any reason to withdraw the charge.

Additionally, since filing the charge, another employee has been let go and we feel that action represented retaliation for the employee's advocacy for himself and others.

I urge you to keep these things in mind when making any decisions effecting Outlook Nebraska and any placement of clients at that entity.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Amy Buresh, President National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska

Commissioner Jirak noted that he read this email this morning before today's meeting. Commissioner Jirak stated that the email made him mad, but perhaps he misinterpreted it. Commissioner Jirak asked how filing an EEOC complaint can be linked to the assumption that an employee was dismissed because he stood up for him/herself based on that concern.

Commissioner Hansen stated that was a separate issue. Commissioner Jirak stated that he would like to have seen some facts in that letter. Chairman Johnson noted that NFB – the National Federation of the Blind is a separate organization from the NCBVI and what they choose to do is their business.

Mark Bulger – Mark asked if it is NCBVI's policy that they will accept written letters in the future from anybody and it will be read at a Board Meeting. It was noted that if an individual is unable to attend a meeting due to a conflict, etc and there is an item on the agenda that they would like to comment on, they are allowed to submit their comment in writing and it will be read if they so request. Whatever is submitted in writing will become part of the record.

Mark noted that he was very pleased with the report from Carlos and Nancy on Outlook Nebraska. Mark noted that he was also enthused with Eric's presentation. Mark stated that he was concerned about the letter from Amy Buresh and he would like clarification regarding the letter.

Commissioner Hansen, the NFB representative on the Board, stated that he would attempt to answer questions. However, he noted that he cannot answer questions regarding the actual charges that were filed, etc due to confidentiality issues.

Commissioner Walla stated that he feels extremely uncomfortable with the letter. Commissioner Walla stated that he felt someone from NFB should have come to the meeting today to read the letter.

Pearl Van Zandt noted that when we open for Public Comment, the verbal comments cannot be screened either. We do not know what the public will say.

Mark Bulger - Mark noted that he heard so many positive things about Outlook Nebraska today and then he hears about this claim. Mark stated that he would like to know more about the claim. Mike Hansen suggested that Mark contact Amy Buresh if he has other specific questions.

Eric noted that Outlook Nebraska has been dealing with this charge for about two years. To address the concerns that NFB has, Outlook Nebraska is willing to open its doors 100% to anyone who wants to come in and tour. Eric stated that he has invited Amy Buresh to visit Outlook Nebraska many times and he has never received a response.

Commissioner Oltman noted that the Board of Commissioners toured Outlook Nebraska in March 2009 and since that time Outlook Nebraska has kept an open dialogue with Carlos and Nancy. Commissioner Oltman thanked Eric for coming today.

Howard Compton – Howard raised serious concerns about NFB-Nebraska's email in that no supporting facts were provided to the Board. Howard stated that he has concerns that this letter may persuade the Board to be biased about ONI.

Glennie Weiland – Glennie asked if the person that was fired was placed at ONI by NCBVI.

Eric noted that this individual has been employed at Outlook Nebraska a couple of different times. This past time he had been contacted by ONI to come back to work for them.

Commissioner Jirak stated for the record that he spoke to Jeff Altman back when the EEOC complaint was filed. Commissioner Jirak mentioned to Jeff that before the Federation bite off more than they can chew, they should consider the two words “structured negotiation.” Jeff Altman’s response was that they had already done that but it did not work.

Commissioner Jirak noted that ACB-N will go on record as not supporting the EEOC charge filed by NFB-N.

Eric reiterated that the doors are always open at ONI and individuals are welcome to schedule a time to come visit.

Everyone thanked Eric from Outlook Nebraska for coming to today’s meeting to give an update on Outlook Nebraska.

Lunch – A lunch break was taken at 11:45 a.m. The meeting resumed at 12:30 p.m.

Focus Topic: Deaf Blind Services

Prior to the meeting, several documents relating to the Focus Topic were emailed to the commissioners. Attached to the minutes for reference is a copy of these documents.

Nancy Flearl noted that the Focus Topic was going to begin with a panel of individuals who have graciously agreed to participate. Nancy introduced the participants and their interpreters. Cheryl Poff will also be available until about 2:30 p.m. to demonstrate other communication devices she uses. Nancy stressed that in working with individuals who are deaf blind it really is important to collaborate with other organizations and build their services into our program in order to maximize the services and to meet the needs of individuals. Nancy thanked the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for everything they do to support NCBVI. Nancy noted that the director of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Dr. Peter Seilers, is present today to offer support and interpreting services. Peter will be speaking later in the Focus Topic.

Nancy introduced the panel members and their interpreters. Nancy thanked everyone for agreeing to be a part of this presentation.

Cheryl Poff began the Focus topic by asking the panel members a series of questions such as:

What have you been doing?

How do you communicate? (Braille, large print, sign language)

What kind of school program do you have?

What kind of work do you do, or did you do in the past?

What kind of things do you do independently at home?

How do you know what time it is, when there is someone at the door or the telephone is ringing?

How do you get around to places like work, medical appointments, grocery shopping?

What do you like to do for fun?

What kind of training are you getting now if any?

What is one of your greatest challenges?

The panel participants gave a variety of answers to the questions and they can be heard by listening to the recording of the Commission Board meeting on NCBVI website. The panel showed how much variety there is among Deaf-Blind individuals, especially in terms of communication styles.

Cheryl Poff thanked everyone for participating in today's Focus Topic. Elaine Kavulak gave a special thank you to the interpreters for their assistance.

Cheryl Poff noted that she had the opportunity to first meet Peter Seilers, executive director of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, at the walk over the Bob Kerrey Bridge last year. Last summer, Pete and his family joined them on the walk.

Dr. Peter Seilers presented. Pete stated that normally he uses his voice, but with the crowd in the room he will use an interpreter. I have a heart for people who are blind and/or deaf. I was blind for a short while when I had some damage to my eye. NCBVI and NCDHH share some equipment used to help individuals who are blind and deaf. NCDHH provides a means of communication to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Pete said it is great to be back in Nebraska. It is my pleasure to be here today. Thank you for asking me.

## Report from the Chairperson

Chairperson Johnson noted that there were several topics that she would like to address during this time.

## Attendance at ACB-N and NFB-N Conventions

Chairman Johnson noted that Commissioner Jirak has formally invited her as Chairman of the Commission to come to the April ACB State Convention. Chairperson Johnson asked for clarification from the board as if this would count for one of the two state conventions she could be reimbursed for.

Commissioner Jirak stated that he would like Chairman Johnson to present at the convention along with Executive Director Pearl Van Zandt. Chairman Johnson stated that she intends to attend the ACB-N convention in April and she would like this to be a reimbursable expense. Chairman Johnson noted that she will provide a report to the Board at the May 2010 meeting.

Commissioner Walla moved to approve Chairman Johnson's attendance with expenses to be reimbursed. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken. Chairman Johnson abstained. The remaining board members were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Hansen noted that he would also like to attend the ACB-N convention in April and he would like his expenses to be reimbursed.

Commissioner Walla moved to approve Commissioner Hansen's attendance with expenses to be reimbursed. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Hansen abstained. The remaining board members were in favor of the motion.

Director Van Zandt noted that the expenses for attending an in-state convention are minimal compared to attendance at a national convention. However, if at some point if the budget does not allow, attendance at some conferences may not be feasible.

Other conference attendance was discussed. Commissioner Walla stated that he would like to attend the NCSAB Spring meeting in Bethesda April 21-23, contingent on his completing the RSA modules by this time.

All commissioners agreed upon his attendance. Commissioner Walla will provide the Board with a report after the meeting.

## Networking Conference Calls

Chairman Johnson noted that she is not available for most evening conference calls due to other conflicts. Commissioner Walla stated that he can begin attending the evening networking conference calls to represent NCBVI. Commissioner Oltman noted that she plans to continue attending these calls when her schedule permits.

## Articles for Center Newsletter

Chairman Johnson reported that she recently submitted an article for the next issue of the Center Newsletter. Chairman Johnson suggested that each commissioner take a turn in submitting an article. All commissioners stated that they were willing to do this.

## Staff Survey

Chairman Johnson inquired if the Board wants to try the web based staff survey again this year considering the problems that were encountered last year. After discussion it was decided to keep the survey web based for this year and not to change anything.

The date of the May 2010 Commission Board meeting was discussed. It was decided to keep the date as May 15 in North Platte.

The commissioners will need to have the survey results about one or two weeks before the May 15 Commission Board meeting. Kathy will send out a schedule for survey completion to commissioners for approval.

#### State Staff Meeting (April 6, 7 and 8)

It was noted that the NCBVI State Staff Meeting is scheduled for April 6, 7 and 8 at Southeast Community College Continuing Education Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. The address is 301 S. 68th Street Place. Staff members and presenters from out of town will stay at the Chase Suites. The address for the hotel is 200 South 68th Street Place.

The presentation of the commissioners to the staff was discussed. Van Zandt noted that she had sent an email to staff asking them to send their suggestions regarding topics for the commissioners to discuss to Kathy. It was noted that only two suggestions have currently been received.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she feels that time set aside for the Board has not been real beneficial. While she enjoys attending the State Staff meeting to learn and to visit with staff, she does not feel the commissioners need a time on the agenda this year. It was stated that having the commissioners present may have been important when NCBVI was first formed. It was decided that the commissioners will not have a set agenda time this year and that the commissioners can attend the meeting as their time permits. The commissioners are to let Kathy know when they will be attending and if they may need hotel accommodations.

## Submission to NCBVI Suggestion Box

Chairman Johnson reported that there was a recent submission to the Staff Suggestion Box. The suggestion noted that NCBVI recognizes Employee and Manager of the Year. The suggestion then asked if NCBVI could recognize outside organizations that we have partnered with who have been super helpful and instrumental in getting blind people and people with multiple disabilities the services they need especially when NCBVI is unable to provide all the services needed.

It was the consensus of the commissioners that this is a great idea. Commissioner Hansen suggested that NCBVI commissioners develop a special certificate or document to recognize the organizations. Commissioner Hansen and Commissioner Oltman volunteered to work out the details of the award.

## 2010 NCBVI Commission Board Meeting Dates and Focus Topics

The remainder of the meeting dates and Focus Topics for 2010 will be as follows: May 15 (Evaluation of the Executive Director) in North Platte; August 14 (Youth Programs) in Hastings; November 6 (Technology Team) in Lincoln.

## Report from the Executive Director

Van Zandt discussed the main highlights of her report and she thanked the Commissioners for their time. The entire report of the Executive Director is to be placed in the minutes, so it is inserted below. Director Van Zandt noted for the record that a print copy or Braille copy of the minutes can be made available to anyone who requests it.

### Executive Director's Report - February 6, 2010

During the past quarter (Oct, Nov & Dec), 392 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients were served in all statuses. 8 were closed having achieved their employment goals. 14 were closed without achieving employment. In the Independent Living (IL) track, we served 479 clients in all statuses. 63 were closed successfully. 13 were closed without achieving their goals.

Official case closures come after a period of time, but here are jobs that clients started during this past quarter:

Caregiver

Production

I.T. Contractor

Packing in a factory setting

Massage Therapist

SSA Customer Service Rep.

Barrier Removal program worker

Independent living advisor

Staff member for Congressman Fortenberry

Operator of a small farm and egg seller

Mental health counselor

Public Relation with the Mexican American Commission

Custodian with Department of Corrections

Telemarketing at Apogee

Telephone operator- Magnification Resources

Mental Health Counselor

Salesclerk at Walmart

Writer

Food service worker

Vendors at State Office Building & RSVP

2 positions as Telemarketers at Apogee

Self employed child care

Business consultant FDR

AmeriCorps

Machine operator at Outlook

Attorney

Cleaning for Hobby Lobby

Worker at Selleck dining Hall

Internship at UNL transportation

Pork producer.

Total Full-time Center Clients Served from 1996 through January 2010 equals 173. 87.2 percent achieved their employment goals. 100 are in Competitive Employment. 23 are Home Makers; 32 are Students. Only 10 percent are not working.

Center Activities included putting on a Thanksgiving dinner for staff, clients and business people; Ringing the Bells for Salvation Army; baking and delivering the treats to services that help us through out the year; a Holiday Center Party which included traditions from several different religions and cultures; attending a Dinner theater; Chanukah celebration; Martin Luther King Celebration Lunch; and a movie weekend. February 12th the Center will attend a formal Valentine's Banquet at Southeast Community College.

CAP - Nothing to report.

Kathy Stephens continues to make updates to NCBVI Website.  
Appreciates input from staff and commissioners.

Work on surplus of non-working technology equipment.

Assist in setting up several new drivers for NCBVI (Defensive Driving Class, etc.)

Assist with payroll.

Continues to work on many miscellaneous tasks as assigned.

Annual 70B (older blind services) report submitted to RSA, Annual 704 (independent living services) report submitted to RSA, 2010 Enrichment Foundation grant application was accepted in the amount of \$10,000, Bob attended the SILC Congress in Nevada (January 2-7).

Filming of five of the seven older blind services videos under production are near completion. Deanna Jesse has been doing a great job keeping that project on track.

Becky Manning began a 14-week undergraduate social work internship on January 11.

The annual North Platte district staff meeting, scheduled for December 8th and 9th, was postponed to February 23rd and 24th.

The state annual report to the Governor was sent the first week of January.

The NP district will have a 4-days group home teaching training for youth the second week of March. The NP district will have a Placement focus training for job seekers for a day during the last week of March.

Gladys Martinez, a VR counselor from NM will provide training to VR staff on February 9 and 10.

Counselors are testing the Netbooks in the field and they are able to use eforce with the new tools. We are still waiting to see if it will work in Scottsbluff.

We are working on finding other ways to manage the WAGES program, so that Carlos is more available to the field services during the summer. Possibly we will hire a temporary person to supervise the program.

We are working on developing a policy and statewide understandings for providing Supported Employment using milestone payments to providers.

The Older Blind Conference is being planned. Staff members and others will give presentations on many blindness and skills issues.

Winnerfest and PI are in the works -we are still seeking a location for PI this year.

eForce continues to develop and be utilized for VR paperwork. The IL section is almost ready, but we are working out issues of usage and system slowness before going live with IL.

All district and center staff groups are learning about career planning and ways to be more effective for our clients.

All groups have now had training in working with traumatic brain injury and other closed head injuries, which are becoming more common.

An employment conference is being planned.

Terry Harris retired on December 29, 2009.

Becky Manning's employment status has been temporarily changed to full-time, from January 11, 2009 to May 6, 2010, while she completes a counseling internship with the agency. Her additional hours are being funded with ARRA funds. There has been a delay in implementing the changes to the employee computer "portal" mentioned in the last update. The change will consolidate several computer Logins into one screen for state employees and also make some minor changes to NIS. Change was to have taken place last December but is still in the works.

We are anticipating hearing from the benefits team at State Personnel about open enrollment meetings for H/R people. Open enrollment is tentatively scheduled to take place early to mid April.

Many federal budget reports for end of the year and end of the quarter have been submitted. Reports of ARRA funding expenditures have been submitted.

We are spending a lot of time on Business Enterprise issues. Two major areas needing attention are the state buildings in Lincoln. All were up for bid, we submitted bids, worked through the process; then all bids were rejected in mid January, with no reasons given. We are working to find out what is happening and what we can do to assure the continued success of those vending units.

Another issue is the National Guard Camp at Ashland. That contract is up June 30, 2010; we are working to resolve issues with the partnering company, staffing, food quality, companies and employees being paid fairly and on time, etc.

We have had additional inquiries from the Auditor about specific things. They randomly look at federal reports, time sheets, expenditure reimbursements, and many other details. We always respond promptly, with documentation needed. We learn from the process and change some procedures as a result.

Annual Newslines fees at this point are \$34,558 plus we pay \$5,000 for maintenance of the Kearney Hub for total of \$39,558.

We provided testimony for LB 754, the Braille Bill, and attended the NFB-N Legislative Breakfast.

In addition to many other meetings and obligations, I am renewing my skills in Braille - I have a Braille pen pal (a Center Client) and have enrolled in an extension course from Hadley School for the Blind.

## Public Comment

Chairman Johnson asked if the public would be invited to attend the Older Blind Conference or if this would be open to clients only. Bob Deaton stated that any one who wants to attend with agency support will need to be a client. The public will also be invited to attend, but they will have to pay a conference fee. If someone is eligible to be a client, but they are not set up as a client yet, NCBVI can arrange to get them set up as a client and pay their fee.

Mark Bulger – Mark noted that last year NCBVI was granted additional funding for a senior specialist position and he asked if this position has been filled.

Director Van Zandt reported that the position (Home Teacher/Orientation Counselor specific for Senior Blind) was added to the Omaha office. NCBVI had three internal applicants and the position was offered to Cheryl Poff. Cheryl's vacant Orientation Counselor position focusing on deaf blind and home teaching was filled by Elaine Kavulak. Elaine's vacant Home Teacher position was filled by Kathy Brown-Hollins. The VR Counselor position that Kathy Brown-Hollins vacated was opened to external applicants and Carol Jenkins was hired for this position. Carol Jenkins recently completed Center training and now she is working in her position in Omaha.

Commissioner Walla stated that he feels NCBVI has a very good staff. Director Van Zandt concurred that NCBVI has a great staff.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board Meeting will be held Saturday, May 15, 2010 in North Platte.

Adjourn

The February 6, 2010 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Julie Johnson

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

## Focus Topic: Deaf Blind Services

Cheryl Poff for the past 10 years has been the coordinator of these services, while working closely with other counselors in the service delivery.

Cheryl was hired for the older blind counselor position, and Elaine Kavulak has been transitioning into providing these services. Cheryl continues to track and maintain the statistics for the deaf blind registry. Elaine now coordinates Hand and Hand, providing more direct independent living services to those in the IL/VR track. Lastly she coordinates the interpreters to facilitate the services. This means working closely with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Like all services to consumers, these services are also individualized. We offer all the same services we would any other consumer, but would utilize certified sign language interpreters.

Some individuals are total deaf and going blind. Some blind going deaf, some that have some residual hearing and vision. Some know sign language, some do not.

We have individuals we have served that have completed training at our center using interpreter services. Of these individuals, one had a self employment goal and the other is working production, another working as an activity aide all continuing to live independently. In their participation in center training we provided interpreters for them to actively participate in all aspects of the center program.

There are others we have worked with that we have done initial training in the field and then contracted services and arranged for them to attend Helen Keller National Center.

One individual has multiple disabilities and we are working closely with Mosaic in placing him in competitive employment.

Another individual has limited support systems and a very narrow job search. He lives in a very small community and employment prospects are limited. We are still working with him on finding employment.

Where still another chose to leave his training at Helen Keller early, has since had a cochlear implant and we are in the process of working with him on finding employment.

There are individuals that have been selective about what services they would receive and have only had field services. One individual that graduated from Nebraska School for the Deaf, we did basic Braille and cane travel, she then transitioned to employment. We placed her at insurance company and later at trucking firm performing clerical duties.

We have individuals that are employed working in food service, vending, clerical and production positions.

Presently we have 3-4 individuals that are in the independent living track that Cheryl has worked with on learning tactile sign language. Elaine has been working with 2-3 on independent living skills.

Currently we have 10-11 individuals in the Vocational Rehabilitation Track, with half of these individuals looking for employment. Included in this number is at least one individual that is being served by the Lincoln District. With 2 new referrals of transition age from Somalia that are learning English as a Second Language and Sign Language.

There are a multitude of variables when working with this population. There are limited support services for on-going support. Due to the isolation that this population experiences with dual sensory loss there can be a higher incidence of mental health issues.

We host the hand and hand support group to give individuals experiencing dual sensory loss the opportunity to network with others and to have social outlets at least every other month.

Most individuals use a long white cane. There is one individual that was interested in having a guide dog and we did the initial application, filmed his travel skills and then worked closely with an instructor to reinforce proper technique/procedure for working with his dog.

As individuals have started employment we have assisted with interpreters for the application and interview process. They have used an interpreter in the initial training and then the employer has provided interpreters or used someone from within the natural environment.

There are a number of resources for assistive technology available. Paging Systems, for phone, door, fire alarm, baby crying(Silent Call/Alert Master). There are high frequency smoke detectors. Many of these items can be made available through the equipment distribution program.

Other tools employed by deaf blind individuals: Zoomtext, others use JAWS with a Braille display. There is the Screen Braille Communicator and Deaf Blind Communicator. There are amplified phones, Captel, TTY. Sorenson Video Relay and Nextalk for telephone communication.

Cheryl Poff has offered to demonstrate the Nextalk and Sorenson Video Relay service if board members would be interested. This equipment is in her office and could possibly do this during a break, lunch or after the board meeting.

There are many methods of communication from sign language, tactile signing, typing/writing messages, print on palm.

The highest number of individuals with dual sensory loss are those over 65 experiencing loss due to the aging process.

The most current numbers on our Deaf Blind Registry are attached with this document along with general information about hiring interpreters.

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
NATIONAL HELEN KELLER DEAF-BLIND REGISTRY OF INDIVIDUALS  
FROM NEBRASKA

DECEMBER 2009

Hello Everyone,

I want to thank you for your on-going dedication in getting all the information for the Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Registry to me throughout the year.

As of January 25, 2010 we have 291 registrants (158 Females and 133 Males) from Nebraska on the Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Registry.

On December 31, 2008 we had 294 registrants.

If we take a look at the cause of combined vision and hearing loss of the 289 current registrants, it looks like this:

Cause of Vision Loss of Nebraskans with Hearing/Vision Loss:

Age Related: Macular Degeneration, Glaucoma, and Cataracts.

70%

Congenital: Rubella, Retinitis Pigmentosa, Retinopathy of Prematurity and other disorders.

16%

Other Health Issues: Diabetes, Optic Nerve Atrophy, Blood Related and unknown causes.

10%

Trauma: Tumor, Accidents, Cancer, and Detached Retina.

4%

Cause of Hearing Loss of Nebraskans with Hearing/Vision Loss:

Age Related: Presbycusis, and Heredity.

33%

Congenital: Rubella, Retinitis Pigmentosa, Retinopathy of prematurity and other disorders.

20%

Other Health Issues: Ear Infections, Mumps, and unknown causes.

29%

Trauma: Scar Tissue, Noise, Fever, Tumor, Cancer, and Accidents.

18%

Submitted by

Cheryl Poff

NCBVI Older Blind Individuals Counselor

## NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED INFORMATION REGARDING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS FOR DEAF-BLIND CONSUMERS

From time to time we have occasions where a Sign Language Interpreter is needed to facilitate communication for our NCBVI Consumers who are Deaf-Blind, so I want to bring to your attention that as of June 30th, 2007 Nebraska has a qualified Sign Language Interpreters law which mandates that State or Government funded agencies go through the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Interpreter Referral Services program to obtain qualified licensed interpreters who are on their directory of interpreters for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind.

To request an interpreter through NCDHH's Sign Language Interpreter directory, you can:

Call their Lincoln office which now handles requests statewide Monday through Friday at 402-3593 or, 1-800-545-6244 or,

You can use their recommended online Statewide Sign Language Interpreter Referral Service at [interpreter.referral@ncdhh.gov](mailto:interpreter.referral@ncdhh.gov) you will be prompted to enter a password and login I.D. which allows you to enter your request for an interpreter/s and check the status of your request.

When you request interpreters through NCDHH, please be prepared to give them the following pertinent information:

Date, time, and appointment location.

Duration (meetings over an hour may require two interpreters).

Event type (meeting, social event etc.)

Contact person (you or designated staff person) name, phone number, e-mail address etc.

Special requirements i.e. ask that interpreters wear plain appropriate color tops for their skin tones, (some deaf-blind individuals may request a color top that best helps them to see). No flashy jewelry bright or flashy fingernail polish or French nails. Also no perfume.

Preferred interpreter (ask the consumer).

Let NCDHH know if you've already contacted interpreters, who did you contact, and the outcome of the contact.

Interpreters are independent free lance contractors who set their own fee for services which can typically start at \$30-\$90.00 an hour with a two hour minimum fee plus a 24 hour cancellation policy.

This means that if an interpreter is only needed for less than two hours, they are guaranteed two hours pay based on their contracted fee for services. If an event is scheduled for over the two hour minimum, they charge the two hour minimum plus an hourly fee. For example, an interpreter is hired to interpret for a three hour event at their rate of \$50.00 per hour; they will bill for the two hour minimum fee of \$100.00 plus \$50.00 for a total of \$150.00 for three hours. (note each half hour is billed at the interpreter's hourly rate).

IMPORTANT: most interpreters have a 24 hour cancellation fee which guarantees that they are paid in case there's a cancellation that occurs less than 24 hours of the event that they were scheduled to interpret. For example, let's say that we have a meeting scheduled with a consumer today and either we, or the consumer are unable to keep the meeting and for whatever reason, the interpreter was not notified within the last 24 hours, they will still bill us for the scheduled interpreting services.

Some deaf-blind consumers are unaware of this 24 hour cancellation policy, therefore it's our responsibility to inform and/or remind them of this and stress that where possible they let us know 24 hours in advance if they are unable to keep an appointment.

Qualified Sign Language Interpreters listed in the NCDHH directory hold one or more of the following qualifications:

National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

National Association of the Deaf

Quality Assurance Screening Test.

PLEASE NOTE that even though interpreters have one or more of the above listed qualifications, this does not necessarily mean that they are qualified to interpret for government agencies, so it's important to go through NCDHH and request their assistance in finding qualified interpreters.

When you contact NCDHH to request assistance in finding a Sign Language Interpreter, it's best to set it up as far in advance as possible, because interpreter services are in high demand due to a shortage of available free lance Sign Language Interpreters across the state.

Another option that we use for some events such as our Hand in Hand Deaf-Blind Peer Support Group outings is to use Support Service Providers (SSP's) who serve as a sighted guide in providing access to the community and/or relays visual and environmental information to consumers who experience a dual hearing/vision loss in the consumer's preferred mode of communication (not necessarily sign language) in order for the consumer to make an informed choice.

If you are working with a consumer who is Deaf-Blind participating in any event that we are a part of and are not sure if the occasion calls for a qualified licensed interpreter or a Support Service Provider (SSP) please contact me and we can work as a team in ensuring that the consumer has access to the options that best meet their needs.

Cheryl Poff

NCBVI Older Blind Individuals Counselor