

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

August 14, 2010; 9:00 a.m.

Hastings, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Lunch will be catered by the Garden Cafe. 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; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-IL, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Sarah Stewart, VR Counselor, Kearney; Shane Buresh, Orientation Counselor, Lincoln;

Public Present: Hubert Paulson; Shirley Allen, Omaha; Barb Epworth, Omaha; Dan Bird; Omaha, Jamie Forbis, NFB Newsline Coordinator; North Platte; Chris Turner, North Platte; Jessica Brennfoerder, Ardene Cordes, York; Laurie Quiring, Hampton; Stephanie Quiring, Hampton; Kathleen Reichard, Grand Island.

Minutes of the May 15, 2010 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Oltman moved to approve the Minutes of the May 15, 2010 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Report from the Chairperson

Chairperson Johnson reported that she continues to work with the Lions Club in York is developing a relationship with them. She also attends the local Visually Impaired Support Group a few times throughout the year. They recently held a meeting on July 21. Mark from Magnification Resources was there to present.

Chairperson Johnson attended the 2010 National NFB Convention in Dallas. This was one of her two National Convention trips for reimbursement. Her report is below.

Summary of Attendance at the NFB national Convention July 2010

Submitted by: Julie Johnson

Thank you to the NCBVI Board of Commissioners for allowing me the opportunity to attend the NFB 2010 National Convention. I learned a lot and met many new people. It was a very valuable experience.

On Saturday I attended presentations from HumanWare on some of their latest products. It was interesting and informative. I enjoyed hearing about how these products are used in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings.

I attended both meetings of The National Association of Guide Dog Users. They are working on a toll free hotline where individuals can call with any questions they might have about guide dog use and legal issues. I think this will be an excellent resource for both clients and staff.

I attended the Mock Trial presented by the Lawyers Division. Although it is presented as funny and entertaining, it was also very informative. It helped me to better understand legal issues regarding reasonable accommodations in the workplace. I also was exposed to careers that blind people are doing that I hadn't previously given much thought about.

I spent some time in the Exhibit Hall as well as the NFB Independence Market. There are so many tools, electronic devices and simple adaptive aids available. I especially appreciated the companies that are making their products accessible out of the box. I was also excited about those companies who utilize existing technology in a new way to create new accessibility options for blind people, like the bar code scanner application for the I-phone.

I attended the general sessions on Tuesday through Thursday. There was far too much information presented to cover here. I most enjoyed hearing about legal advancements that are being made so that blind people can participate meaningfully in all areas of life. My favorite speaker was the blind doctor. His presentation really challenged me to think about what blind people are capable of, in ways that I had never considered before.

It was an extremely valuable experience. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to go.

Chairperson Johnson asked the other commissioners if they had any information they wish to share.

Commissioner Oltman reported that she continues to attend the SRC & Board Networking group meetings. Mike Bullis from Maryland is now in charge of the conference call and he is getting more participation from other states. Commissioner Oltman noted that she feels these meetings are very worthwhile. The next meeting will be in September. Commissioner Oltman encouraged all commissioners to join the meeting if they are available.

Commissioner Walla reported that he recently attended a Guide Dog school where he met a lot of blind individuals who are all at different levels of training.

Report from the Executive Director

Executive Director Dr. Pearl Van Zandt made a public apology to the Nebraska Association for the Blind group that meets in Nebraska City once a year and kindly invites her to speak each year. This year she planned on attending, but the date passed and she forgot to go. Van Zandt stated that she hopes that they do continue to invite her back.

STAFFING UPDATE

Kearney Voc Rehab Tech, Becky Manning, resigned effective 8-27-2010.

Omaha Rehab Counselor, Robert Newman, submitted Retirement letter, effective 12-31-2010.

We are seeking to reclassify the Personnel Officer position held by Dave Robinson, to Accountant II.

We are examining the duties of other NBE positions, but have not initiated any reclassification requests yet.

Field Services

Since October 1, 2009, 495 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients were served in all statuses. 25 were closed having achieved their employment goals. 52 were closed without achieving employment. In the Independent Living (IL) track, we served 840 clients in all statuses. 211 were closed successfully. 35 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: administrative assistant, travel agent, customer service, chief electrical inspector (job retention), sales representative, therapist, housekeeper, farmhand, landscaper, marketer, mechanic, hospital custodian, BEP vendor.

Center Services

Total Full-time Center Clients Served from 1996 through July 2010 equals 179. Eighty seven percent achieved their employment goals; 103 are in Competitive Employment; 23 are Home Makers; 35 are Students. Only 10 percent are not working.

Activities of the Center

ACB-N state convention

Older Blind conference (some clients and staff)

Fishing

Employment work-shop

WAGES staff received a short Center training

Encaustic art work-shop (melting wax over objects)

PI activity

NFB National Convention

Wages activity

County Fair Clients entered food and other items

National Monument in Beatrice

Fishing, canoeing and team building rope activity will be held in September.

Deputy Directors and North Platte District

Denise Johnston-Rauterkus and Sarah Stewart attended the employment workshop in May.

Eight clients attended FYI in North Platte April 12-15. One of the participants required a Spanish-speaking interpreter, a volunteer currently completing her training in the Training Center for the Blind in Lincoln. This client and her interpreter also attended the older blind conference in Kearney last week.

Jan Brandt, Jamie Forbis, Carlos Servan, and Bob Deaton attended the 2010 annual NFB National Convention in Dallas.

Bob Deaton attended the 2010 annual ACB National Convention in Phoenix.

Project Independence (PI) took place in Lincoln from July 20-24. Nine campers started PI, and 5 finished.

WAGES took place from June 14 to July 26. There was a week of staff training before WAGES actually started. The North Platte district is launching a group skill training program for younger employment-bound consumers on August 9th, wrapping up on August 12th. Eight people are registered for training; the youngest is 20 years of age, and the oldest is 52. The training will be in North Platte. It is called CORE (Creating Opportunity and Raising Expectations). (Note: CORE was held the week immediately preceding the Commission Board Meeting.)

Omaha District Update

We have had a busy summer; we have had staff out working the various transition programs, convention and vacations. One staff member has been out ill. We have been busy supporting each other to meet the needs of caseload activities and consumer needs. Since the summer programs ended we have concentrated on all the details of students returning to school.

A number of the students attending WAGES this summer were from the Omaha District. They gained a great deal from this experience and are interested in pursuing employment in their home community since their return.

We have our group teaching sessions starting up again at the end of August for older blind individuals. We have a larger number of individuals interested in taking part in the program.

Referrals have been a bit slow, but that is typical of the summer months. Cheryl Poff the older blind counselor is beginning to get request for in-services from senior centers and assisted living facilities.

We have been working hard with employers in our area. The market continues to be very tight. We have continued to do employer outreach and develop On the Job Training opportunities. Are presently working with UNMC/Nebraska Medical Center, they are interested in providing OJT's and internships, to promote opportunities.

The state office building in Omaha has had a review by Homeland Security to check our emergency plans and where we might have weaknesses in security.

This is to help address emergencies in event of fire, flood, tornado, bombing,

workplace violence, etc. So I am in the process of putting into to place procedures and making sure staff will have the necessary training in these procedures.

Lincoln District Report

This quarter we had someone get a job as a part time Housekeeper, a Farmhand, a part-time Landscaper, a Marketer, a temporary Mechanic, part time hospital custodian, and a BEP vendor. We set up an internship for a researcher at Nebraska Appleseed. We are working with St. Elizabeth's to set up an internship for a medical transcriber. We are working with University Housing to set up an on the job experience in the janitorial area. We would like to take responsibility for a regular task once a week. The placement class followed up on assignments from the conference in May. We talked about networking, disclosure, and more networking. State Personnel came over and conducted mock interviews.

We will have GATE starting up again this month. The shorter version of GATE is working well.

We had training from Susan Rucker on a Client Centered Approach to Career Planning and a separate training on communication. Larry Roos continues to receive benefits training. We may have student intern next semester. She needs to complete 150 hours over a 15 week period. She is blind and able to teach the alternatives of blindness. We are waiting to hear if this site is approved.

Business Office and NBE (Nebraska Business Enterprise)

NBE has been working with a Team approach for several months. From now on, it will be a part of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services under Carlos Serván. Carlos will supervise Don Ward and Jan Stokebrand; other team members are Pearl, Bill Brown and Dave Robinson. Don, Carlos, Bill, & Dave attended Randolph Sheppard Conference for NBE. Three vendors also attended. RSA gave stipends for several to attend, federal stimulus funds (ARRA) paid for the others.

Put together Contract proposal for Vending in NSOB – a new concept bringing restaurant caterers into the cafeteria in Lincoln. Several people worked on this project and continue to work to put the plan in place.

Submitted Reallotment proposal to RSA

Started Preliminary work on Budget for 12-13 including strategy on funding and Modification issues

Bill and Dave paid a lot of bills

Kathy Stephens worked on and completed Fixed Asset year end inventory Division 001 (bar code scanning) for 2010. Don Ward will complete the inventory for Division 003.

Kathy also worked on the following projects: Trade In Surplus for 18 Braille Notes; National Conventions (ACB and NFB) – completed registrations, hotel reservations and travel arrangements for those attending; assisted with making the arrangements for staff and vendors attending the Randolph Sheppard Conference and the 2010 SCD: Partners Building Bridges Conference. Attended Kick-Off event for 2010 Charitable Giving Campaign.

Dave Robinson:

I've been made a part of the NBE team and will assume additional duties, yet to be specified, in relation to NBE.

Attended a Randolph-Sheppard Leadership Conference June 9-12, 2010 in Washington D.C. and the timing of the conference was perfect, in that it coincided with my recently becoming a member of the NBE team and I gathered a wealth of very valuable information, regarding Randolph-Sheppard, which I'm anxious to apply to my additional duties.

We just received approval for our Governor mandated furlough plan. All full-time labor agreement covered employees will be required to take 2 days (16 hours) of unpaid leave, between now and December 31, 2010. Three part-time labor agreement covered employees will also be required to participate, but the amount of their participation will be in relation to their F.T.E. assignment and not the full 16 hours. One will take 12 hours, another will take 8 hours and the remaining employee will be required to take 5 hours.

The furlough applies only to the 40 NAPE/AFSCME labor agreement employees and not to Classified Rules & Regs. employees.

Dottie Wilmott and Bob Deaton have been working on eForce. Dottie is completing the changes needed to begin tracking our Independent Living services as well as Voc Rehab. We plan to go live with IL October 1, 2010.

End of Report.

The procedure of having the Executive Director submit their goals for the upcoming year to them in writing for the upcoming year was discussed. Chairperson Johnson moved to do away with having the Executive Director submit the yearly goals to the Board with the provision that this procedure can be reinstated if needed. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Youth Services-Transition Programs

Prior to today's meeting, Bob Deaton sent documents to the Board regarding the Focus Topic for their review. The documents are posted at the end of the Minutes for informational purposes. Some participants of these programs are here today to discuss their experiences in the programs Project Independence (PI), Work and Gain Experience in the Summer (WAGES) and Winnerfest. The participants will talk to us about the programs they participated in. Bob Deaton stated that as an agency, we have some broad objectives and goals in mind as we plan these events. We want to show blind youth that the world is accessible and opportunities are available. Blind people should strive to set goals that meet their personal interests and abilities. We encourage people to set high expectations for them.

Shane Buresh was a part of the planning committee for PI this year and part of PI about 20 years ago when he participated in the program as a youth. Shane is also involved in Winnerfest. PI is for youth 14 years of age and younger.

Shane Buresh – thanks for allowing me to address the Board in this capacity. Shane stated that he enjoys working with youth programs and that is one of the things that made him want to work for NCBVI.

Shane noted that blind youth are our future and we have the chance to start rehabilitation at an early age which can be very impactful. Unfortunately, some other states do not harness this same philosophy in the same way. They do not spend much time with youth. Shane appreciates that NCBVI started some of these programs over 20 years ago and we continue to expand and form new programs. NCBVI has also become more interactive in the employment process over the years. Some people think that our youth programs take too much of our time, but he disagrees. NCBVI mission statement "Empowering Blind People" is what our programs really try to do. Many youth come from towns in Nebraska where they may be the only blind person at their school. Shane noted that he came from a small town and knew no other blind youth. What he thought about himself as a blind person did not come until he attended the youth programs. A lot of blind students come from dysfunctional or disadvantaged homes. Shane stated that he grew up in a low income home; and therefore, he did not have a lot of opportunities. NCBVI Youth programs give blind youth many opportunities that they would not otherwise receive. All of the things that come out of NCBVI mission statement we try to put into practice. Winnerfest is a retreat style program. This program has grown over the years. For those who are not born blind, but become blind later, it is interesting the perspective you can get from these programs. Shane noted that some of his life long friends he met at those programs when he was a youth. Shane stated that he remembers being a teenager and asking other blind adults how they did tasks around their homes.

Shane stated that one of the unique abilities that he now has is to help plan for programs. Shane says that he enjoys helping plan the programs and he likes what is in place and he likes to expand. Shane stated that he will be happy to take questions later if there are any.

Bob Deaton stated that he felt Shane pointed out some very important points about the Youth Program. Bob stated that he feels one very important thing that the agency does is help people network and to meet positive blind role models. Rehabilitation does not really begin until there is networking. The agency can show people how to do things and can talk about what it means to be blind and all of that, but the real adjustment to blindness and the understanding occur when blind people interact with each other. The programs are very popular and the kids almost always write in the evaluation that they wish the program could be longer.

Winnerfest occurs twice per year, in March and November. Bob asked Kathleen and Stephanie to speak about their experiences at Winnerfest. Specifically, talk about why they come, why it is important and what they get out of the program. Bob also asked Lori to speak on a parent's perspective.

Lori noted that she has heard many great things about Winnerfest and WAGES. She noted that Stephanie and her life would not be the same without those programs. As for WAGES, she likes the length of the program because the youth receive a longer time to see reality of getting up for a job everyday and making it there on time. Winnerfest is a much shorter time which she refers to as "practice sessions" because it gives Stephanie an opportunity to be on her own and away from her family. The time spent with other kids is very beneficial and it is a great opportunity to meet friends and develop networks. While Stephanie was home schooled, there are no other blind children in the Hampton area. Lori stated that these are wonderful programs and she is so happy that Stephanie has had this opportunity.

Stephanie stated that she really does enjoy Winnerfest. It has been a very good experience for her to meet people and she appreciates some of the topics and themes that Winnerfest has. They have taught her a lot. In technology she got to see a lot of technology for the blind and it was really cool. She also enjoyed the scavenger hunt. It helped her learn where things are and taught her to ask questions if she needs to. Stephanie stated that she really enjoys these programs.

Bob noted that Kathleen Reichard has mentioned that she would like a program on how to move out of your parents' home and start living on your own. Bob asked Kathleen to elaborate on this. Kathleen Reichard noted that she is currently 17 years old and a junior at Grand Island High School. Kathleen stated that she has a lot to learn about moving out on her own. Kathleen noted that her parents plan to move as soon as she graduates from high school so she will need to find an apartment, learn how to cook and clean. Kathleen said she would like to develop good skills and learn how to do all of this. She would like to have other blind youth come and talk about their experiences and how they learned skills to live on their own.

Kathleen noted that when she was five years old she was in a car accident and lost all of her vision immediately and she gradually started getting it back. Now the doctors predict that the vision will be gone again by the time she is 20 years old. In Winnerfest she learned a lot about etiquette. She also enjoyed the scavenger hunt. It taught her how to ask questions. When she entered high school she noticed that she was the only normal high functional person that has a vision and hearing impairment. Everyone else was mentally challenged and in a special education room which they tried to stick her in, but she refused.

When she went to Winnerfest for the first time she was 14 years old. There were about 20 people there who were just like her having vision and hearing impairments. Kathleen stated that Amy Buresh taught her a lot about not being ashamed of being blind and she gave her the courage to go out and try for cross country. Other people had told her to quit because it was not safe. This made her and other blind people mad and they talked about it. Kathleen stated that participating in these programs has helped her get to know herself as a blind person. At one time she denied that she has visually impaired but she no longer does this.

Bob Deaton noted that we will now talk about PI. This program was originally for teenagers. Then when we introduced Winnerfest and WAGES into our programs, PI became Summer Kids for Independence Program and it targeting the younger people. At one time it was called SKIP/PI or SKIPPI, now it is simply PI.

This past Summer PI was held in Lincoln. There was some difficulty this year in that a few participants did not make it through the entire program due to medical issues. Bob asked Jessica to talk about PI.

Jessica noted that she was one of the individuals who did make it through PI this past year. She already knew some of the participants, but she also made a lot of new friends. Jessica stated that it is nice to have younger kids who are blind so you can help them and cheer them on. Jessica was 8 or 9 years old when she went to her first PI. In the morning it was nice to do activities with the Commission staff, such as cooking, wrapping presents and sharing their blind stories. She enjoyed spending time with the staff and she enjoyed the talent show. Jessica concluded by stating that PI is a great group.

Bob noted that the documents he sent by email also talked about other programs such as Teen Adventures in Blind Skills (TABS). Also for the past couple of years Shane and Amy Buresh have been working with the Fremont Public Schools and Shane's reports are part of the package that was emailed to the commissioners. The reports are also posted at the end of these minutes.

Stephanie talked about WAGES. She stated that she had a great time at WAGES and she really appreciates Carlos and the respect shown to place her in a job that he felt would be a good match for her. She also appreciated the fun opportunities such as climbing the 50 foot obstacle course and being able to do the zip line. The first year in WAGES Stephanie did the Commission training, the second year she did part Commission and part job at Lancaster Records where she shredded paper. The third year she did Christian Record Services for the Blind. She stated she had a great time at that job. Stephanie talked about how she got to work and the activities they did in the evenings.

Lori Quiring mentioned the benefits of Stephanie having the opportunity to participate in these events in sequential years. The programs truly help kids connect and they can be a life changing event.

Kathleen asked Stephanie how she got to work on time. Stephanie stated she got up earlier so she had plenty of time to get ready and then she took the city bus to work. Stephanie stated her O & M instructor worked with her on getting to work before she graduated.

Bob Deaton stated that after the first week students are usually confident enough to make it on their own to work. If a student needs additional help a job coach will assist them.

Programs such as WAGES give youth job experience that they may not otherwise receive. The programs also give children exposure to other blind children. It was the consensus that all these programs are very worthwhile and they need to continue.

Chris Turner stated that the youth programs are great in that they expose youth to other blind people. In a state like Nebraska it is not likely that blind people will find each other that often because Western Nebraska is quite urban and blind people can become isolated. There are many benefits that come out of these programs.

Lori Quiring noted that these programs involve young people who want to be productive and successful in life. Many times they just need someone to teach them what to do.

Mike Hansen thanked all the youth for coming to today's meeting. While the board receives reports about the programs it is so meaningful to hear the passion in the voices of the youth who attend the programs.

A break was taken at 11:10 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11:25 a.m.

Public Comment

Shirley Allen asked if NCBVI has problems convincing parents to let their children attend the programs. She mentioned that she met some parents of a blind women who thought that because her eyes did not work her brain did not work. This lady was from Iowa.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that it can happen. A Counselor of the Commission usually has been working with the family and the individual so many of the questions they may have are answered early on. At times it is very difficult for the families to let go of the kids.

Commissioner Jirak inquired as to the status of the pending EEOC case NFB has against Outlook Nebraska. Commissioner Hansen stated that not much has changed regarding that situation.

Bob Deaton noted that this is usually an individual situation. Each new referral comes from a different perspective. Bob stated that he feels it is a matter of trust. The programs truly do help kids connect with others who are similar to them.

Mike Hansen asked if NCBVI finds that parents of low vision kids are in denial of the blindness. Bob stated that parents and children are often in denial of the blindness.

Pearl noted that there are resources for parents and there are two national organizations which they can join. These are the American Council for the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind (ACB and NFB).

Ardene Cordes asked if the agency presents programs for the general public to attend on blindness.

Executive Director Van Zandt stated that NCBVI does training sessions on blindness at places of business, senior centers and schools. The NCBVI website is also a great resource as well as two videos “The Encounter” and “The Life You Choose.” Van Zandt noted that if NCBVI had a program about blindness for the general public there would probably not be much interest because most times the public will attend events that relate directly to them.

The commissioners thanked everyone for their participation and contribution to the Focus Topic.

A lunch break was taken at 12:00 noon.

The meeting resumed at 1:00 p.m.

Old Business

DAS/NIS update

Executive Director Van Zandt noted that DAS/NIS is now AS/EDGE or Department of Administrative Services/Nebraska Information Systems is now Administrative Services/Enterprise Data for Government Efficiency.

There are no other updates at this time.

NFB Newslines Update

Jamie Forbis was present to give the NFB-Newsline® update. Jamie emailed her report to the commissioners earlier this week and it is posted below.

NFB-Newsline®

August 11, 2010

By

Jamie K. Forbis, Nebraska NFB-Newsline® Outreach Coordinator

This summer started out slow for NFB-Newsline® Nebraska, but it heated up quickly! At the meeting in May I had recently attended the Standing Tall and Taking Charge conference in Kearney. A lot of calls and emails were sent from subscribers who attended the conference and had questions about Newsline. It was a great opportunity to update contact information and get some subscribers using Newsline that hadn't in a while. In June I contacted subscribers that had moved out of state to transfer their contact information. Four subscribers were transferred and 4 subscribers remained in the Nebraska data base because they use their cell phones and the local access number to read NFB-Newsline®. I've continued to update contact information for subscribers and remove those who have passed away or have moved.

July kicked off with the NFB national convention where I assisted at the NFB-Newsline® table in the exhibit hall. It was fun to speak with subscribers and coordinators of other states. I received new materials while at the convention and can now offer the option of instructions and brochures on CD to subscribers. A new feature was also launched at the convention. It's a feature that's been in the works for a while and finally got off the ground. Podable News allows you to choose, cafeteria style, the sections of papers you want to read and compile them into your own paper. This can be used on any MP3 player as well as the Victor Reader Stream and the Book Sense. Subscribers can access this feature by visiting NFB-Newsline online at: <http://www.nfbnewslineonline.org/>. Besides the work at the convention I was busy in July adding subscribers, answering questions,

contacting new applicants and writing an article for the Nebraska Independent.

This month I hope to set up a face to face meeting with Dr. Van Zandt concerning the phone line in Lincoln and David Oertli with TBBS. I would also like to revise the application to include the option for materials on CD and include a section for the Commission counselor to fill out so the counselor can be contacted for additional information. Once these changes have been completed I will submit the application for the board's approval.

Now let's check out what the subscribers have been up to. At the beginning of this last quarter NFB-Newsline® Nebraska had 1,400 subscribers. May ended the month with 1,408 subscribers. These subscribers called Newsline 1,077 times for a total of 19,531 minutes. Subscribers accessed the state newspapers 1,977 times the local channel 125 times and the TV listings were accessed 429 times. The average call was 18.14 minutes and 52.65% of the calls were made using the local number.

Things cooled down in June with only 2 new subscribers added. Out of the 1,410 subscribers 932 calls were made to Newsline for a total of 16,844 minutes. The state newspapers were accessed 2,683 times, the local channel 107 and TV listings 370. The calls lasted approximately 18.07 minutes and 44.06 of those calls were through the local number.

July heated up things with 27 new applicants in Nebraska. The number of calls made to Newsline in July was 1,017 for a total of 17,930 minutes. The state newspapers were accessed 2,798 times, local channel 142 times and TV listings 528 times. Subscribers spent about 17.63 minutes reading

Newsline per call and 41.58 of those calls were made using the local number.

The grand total of subscribers to date is 1,441 which is well on the way to 1,500! Thanks to the staff at the Commission and the Talking Book and Braille Library the word of NFB-Newsline® continues to spread wide and far. With even more promotional materials in the works I hope to hit 2,000 subscribers by this time next year!

Jamie distributed to the commissioners a packet containing information that she gives to subscribers. The packet contains Braille and print users guide, a Braille and print brochure and a CD which contains the user's guide, brochure and other information. Jamie noted that she also sends new subscribers an information card.

The revision of the Newline application was discussed. It was the consensus of the commissioners that Jamie did not need to seek their approval of the new application. Jamie is to work with Executive Director Van Zandt in revising the application.

Jamie noted that Newline has some new promotional items that will be coming out and she has some posters, etc. that she will distribute to the other Commission offices.

Jamie noted that Pearl Van Zandt did send her an email in regard to the phone line and she has talked to Pearl and Kathy about scheduling a time to meet later this month. Jamie stated that she has some concerns about the possibility of Kathy taking over some of the responsibilities of the phone line. The concern is mostly about Kathy answering questions from subscribers since she is not a daily user of Newline. Jamie noted that she also feels that she can best answer questions about technology used in reading Newline.

Kathy has become an agent so she is now able to post items to the NFB Newline website. Jamie noted that editing must be done before posting and she plans to talk to Kathy about this also.

Commissioner Jirak asked why Kathy has become an agent. Director Van Zandt noted that she recently read in the Braille Monitor about agency sponsor functions. NCBVI is the agency sponsor, but we had never gone online to see from the agency perspective our access to Newsline and to have more involvement as to monitoring and posting things. This is when Kathy and Pearl began working on this.

Jamie stated that she feels that she is getting things done in a timely manner as it relates to Newsline. Jamie stated that she has no problem with Kathy posting Commission meeting minutes, etc. to Newsline, but documents do need to be edited quite a bit and Kathy has not had that training to post things correctly since she is not a user. Jamie stated that she does a lot of formatting behind the scenes to post items to Newsline. Jamie noted that editing has become second nature for her.

Commissioner Jirak went on record to state the Jamie is doing an outstanding job with Newsline. She is very approachable, very upbeat and very easy to work with. Commissioner Jirak encouraged Jamie to keep up the good work.

Commissioner Jirak suggested that when Jamie sends her Newsline reports that she send them to the entire board email address. All commissioners were in agreement.

Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI pays for Newsline quarterly. For the phone the cost is \$4,866 per year and the phone and contract itself costs the agency \$34,558 per year. NCBVI pays NFB Newsline for the service in Nebraska. The \$4,866 is the telecommunications subscription fee which includes calls using the toll free line and the other regional phone line.

Commissioner Jirak noted that in LB 352, Sec. 21.63-106, items c, e and f, it indicates some items that the Commission shall provide and do.

Commissioner Jirak inquired as to if NCBVI is in compliance with these items. Executive Director Van Zandt noted that Jamie's role is what does item c which is "provide for daily monitoring to assure prompt and accurate functioning." Items e and f which state "develop and implement procedures for user certification" and "serve as a coordinator between the system operator and the certified users", are also being complied with. NCBVI and NFB work together to ensure that the provisions of the law are carried out.

Client Assistance Program complaints or issues

Executive Director Van Zandt reported that there were no complaints or issues at this time nor had there been any during the past quarter.

Update on Randolph shepherd Program Bids

Executive Director Van Zandt reported that she and Bill Brown met with individuals from the State Office Building on Thursday of this week to discuss the cafeteria in the lower level.

The NSOB Cafeteria in the lower level will be closed beginning Monday, August 23, 2010, for renovation. The Cafeteria will reopen the morning of August 30, 2010. The renovated Cafeteria will include a new look and an entirely revamped lunch menu which will include a wide selection of choices being provided by local caterers such as Mazatlan, the Parthenon, Parkers Smokehouse, Mr. GoodCents, Valentinos and Braeda/Runza (Note: since this meeting, Mazatlan has decided not to participate).

During the renovation, our vendor will close down for cleaning as well. As of August 30 the vendor will still provide breakfast items in the morning and break food for the afternoon.

The remaining vending part of the bids for vending in Lincoln state facilities is still not determined.

Things are running well with the Ashland National Guard Camp. The vendor for this site is working closely with the partner entity who provides the food and the big picture mechanisms of running the mess hall. The vendor does the work to make sure everything is running properly. NCBVI also has a contract with the National Guard in Hastings, but the training that is at this location is one or two weekends every six months or so. Therefore, it is not nearly as large of a project as Ashland.

Budget Update

Executive Director Van Zandt reported that the draft Budget Narrative was due on August 2. The draft was emailed to the commissioners for their information. Van Zandt noted that the State of Nebraska is facing a severe budget deficit and therefore it was important for the next biennium to be up front about how much funding we need to operate, but yet not push for extra funding because all state agencies will be lucky if they receive level funding. The current appropriation is \$1,012,185.00 in state money (General Funds). This amount is used to match our grants and to fund the Senior Blind Program. This amount matches our grants, sustains our maintenance of effort (a federal requirement), and when combined with BEP set aside and our trust fund purchases allows us to maintain our programs plus request reallocation funds when available.

We do not believe it is in our best interests to request additional state general funds in the current economic and political times.

The biennium proposal is due on September 15, 2010. Part of the proposal will be a budget modification. In the past this has been a 5% decrease in funding, but this year it is a 10% decrease in funding. The agency needs to explain how we operate with a 10 % decrease in funding. Last year we indicated that we would spend less on case services, employee relocation, tuition assistance, sending individuals to conferences, consulting services, minimize board and lodging for individuals, and fewer state vehicles. The item the agency would least like to cut is staffing. Van Zandt noted the cutting 10% would have a huge impact on the agency. Chairperson Johnson stated she would be willing to hold the quarterly Commission Board meetings in Lincoln and Omaha for the next year if needed for budget purposes.

Executive Director Van Zandt thanked everyone for their input into the budget discussion.

Discussion of Service Provider Award

Chairperson Johnson noted that earlier a suggestion had been sent to the suggestion box to have an award to companies, agencies, organizations, etc. that go above and beyond to further the Commission's mission. The commissioners earlier decided to have a Service Provider Award for this recognition. The commissioners discussed the final details about the award.

Commissioner Hansen noted that the discussion regarding this award began in February 2010. The commissioners decided to have two separate awards. The first award will be a certificate for groups or individuals who support NCBVI and the second award will be a plaque or something similar for groups or individuals who have gone over and beyond what is expected.

The commissioners discussed names for these two awards. Commissioner Hansen recommended calling the first award “Ally in Blindness Independence” and the second award “Commissioners’ Advocacy in Blindness Award.”

Commissioner Walla moved to name the two awards as stated above. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Hansen agreed to work on designing the certificate and developing criteria to be used when giving out these awards. Commissioner Hansen will email his suggestions to the commission board for their input.

New Business

Election of Board Positions

Commissioner Oltman moved to re-elect Julie Johnson as Chairperson.

Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. Commissioner Johnson abstained. A roll call vote was taken and the remaining four commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Walla moved to re-elect Jim Jirak as Vice Chairperson. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. Commissioner Jirak abstained. A roll call vote was taken and the remaining four commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Jirak moved to re-elect Darrell Walla as Executive Secretary. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. Commissioner Walla abstained. A roll call vote was taken and the remaining four commissioners were in favor of the motion.

The commissioners were congratulated on their appointments.

Discussion of Procedures Regarding Board Members Application for NCBVI Employment

Commissioner Jirak asked to discuss the ethical implications of a Commission Board member seeking employment with NCBVI while still sitting as a board member. Commissioner Johnson asked Director Van Zandt to highlight the procedures to be followed.

Director Van Zandt stated that she has referred to the information that was gathered when this situation did arise in July 2009.

Van Zandt stated at that time we checked with the Accountability and Disclosure Commission Director, Frank Daly, and with William Wood who is the Director of Employee Relations with State Personnel. They both indicated that the important thing was that the individual complete the Potential Conflict of Interest statement. This form addresses what the issues are and in the case of a commissioner wanting to become an employee, it could go both ways. It could be perceived that there is pressure on the agency to hire them since they are in the lofty position of being a commissioner. It could also be perceived that if they did not get hired, the fear that the person could hold a grudge and serve as a commissioner in a way that was counterproductive based on their own personal grudge. Neither of these circumstances would be good. There could also be the potential that a commissioner that is hired would then feel like they had more say in things and did not have to follow rules or listen to their supervisor, etc. The main thing for the individual is to think through all these things and explain it correctly on the form. Once the form is completed and submitted it is reviewed by the Director of Accountability and Disclosure Commission.

Commissioner Jirak stated that the concerns that he had last year have already been addressed by Director Van Zandt. Commissioner Jirak noted that there is a potential for a perceived conflict and he suggested that the individual resign as commissioner in order to avoid any potential for the appearance of a conflict.

Commissioner Hansen stated that NCBVI needs to do what it can to ensure that we have the best people possible serving on the Board of Commissioners as well as employed by NCBVI. Obviously a person cannot do both so if they were a commissioner and became a NCBVI employee you would need to resign as commissioner.

If NCBVI was to impose a rule stating that if a commissioner was to apply for a NCBVI position they need to resign as a commissioner, the agency could lose a very qualified commissioner if they did not get the NCBVI position. Commissioner Hansen noted that we know from our battles with employment, finding a job when you are blind is an extremely difficult thing to do. By making a rule as suggested, you would be limiting employment possibilities for a blind individual. Mike noted that you could have a very intelligent stay at home person who serves on the board of commissioners and they wish to find lucrative employment with NCBVI. If we have a rule stating that they cannot do this because they are on the board of commissioners, this would take away the opportunity for them.

Commissioner Walla inquired about a commissioner who has applied for a NCBVI position which is pending and the Board goes into an executive session. It was the consensus that the commissioner would be asked to step out of the room during the executive session.

Commissioner Hansen stated that a commissioner who has applied for a NCBVI position may be asked to recuse themselves from voting on certain items. Director Van Zandt stated that it is reasonable to ask a commissioner to recuse themselves on some votes if it is their last meeting and they are going to be a NCBVI staff person.

Review of Suggestion Box Email Prodigal

Chairperson Johnson noted that the subject should be Review of Suggestion Box Email Protocol. Chairperson Johnson stated that this past summer she was unavailable to do daily NCBVI Commission Chair duties. If an item would have been in the NCBVI suggestion box she may not have gotten to it.

Therefore, Chairperson Johnson suggested having the suggestions go to the entire board of commissioners' email and not just the Chairs' email. All commissioners were in favor of this change. Kathy Stephens will send a note to the suggestion box when this revision has been completed.

The commissioners indicated that when possible they would appreciate receiving all commission meeting documents no later than the Friday the week before the meeting.

Next meeting: November 6, 2010; Lincoln (Focus Topic: Tech Team)

Adjourn

The August 14, 2010 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Julie Johnson

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Transition Services

The following text was excerpted from the 2009 report to the Governor regarding services provided by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI):

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.

Blind only means different

An intern working with us shares his thoughts

We have three employees working at Saint Elizabeth this summer who are all taking part in the "Work and Gain Experience in the Summer " (WAGES) program. One is blind and two are unable to hear. But all sure can work!

□ Jeremy Fifield, 19, is from Alliance and has been working in various areas of HR---and handling them all incredibly well!. He is also a champion speaker! Jeremy won the State Class B title with a speech addressing the topic: Being Blind is not Worse or Better---just different. He will present his 8-minute award-winning speech to us all this week. Stop in and hear it---I guarantee you will be impressed!

Being Blind is Just Different

WED, JULY 21 @ 11:15am & 11:45am (Franciscan Room)

Khadar Adan, 21, and his younger brother have been working for Bob Schiffbauer, our gardener---and he has kept them busy! Most recently they scrapped and repainted the railing at the north entrance. They also cleaned patio tables in the outdoor garden café, worked in the gardens, and just about every corner of our campus where Bob found them work. They wanted to work outdoors.

The internships for these fine young people ends next week. All say they have enjoyed their experiences and have learned a lot. We wish them the best!

From Saint Elizabeth's online newsletter published 7/19/10

Project Independence

June 20-24, 2010

Submitted by Bob Deaton

July 30, 2010

Project Independence (PI) Planning Committee:

Kathy Brown-Hollins

Shane Buresh

Bob Deaton

Jamie Forbis

NCBVI Staff Members working PI:

Kathy Brown-Hollins

Sherrie Bruegman

Amy Buresh

Shane Buresh

Kelly Coleman

Connie Daly

Bob Deaton

Glenn Ervin

Jamie Forbis

Elaine Kavulak

Larry Mackey

Larry Roos

Volunteers:

Maida Avdic

Andrea Chizek

Rachna Keshwani

Laurie Plautz

Drivers:

Dan Byrd

Roger Lewien

Stan Schrag

Dick Shonerd

This year, PI was almost the program that didn't happen. Concerns had been raised about the appropriateness of accommodations at Selleck Hall on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus following PI in 2009. While no problems came up, deficiencies with the security of housing accommodations were recognized.

Efforts were made to find alternative facility that would meet our needs in the summer of 2010. Camp Calvincrest had been the site of several programs in the past, but other agencies and organizations now have priority during the times we most wanted to go there.

We also looked at other locations such as Wesleyan University, Carol Joy Hollings Conference and Retreat Center, Delta Gamma (a sorority), Rodgers House (a bread and breakfast), and several camps in the surrounding area. We also considered staying at The Leadership Center in Aurora and using the local community center for our base of operations during the day. For one reason or another, these arrangements were either not possible or inadequate.

It was really getting pretty late in the game by the time Connie Daly and I visited the Ortner Center on the campus of Union College. Because of Special Olympics International, the Ortner Center was not available during the third full week in July when PI typically takes place, but the third full week of June was open. Connie and I thought the Ortner Center met our needs as far as security, accessibility, and overall accommodations, and so plans for PI went ahead after all.

This is not to say that the Ortner Center was ideal. During the seminar held for the benefit of the parents on the first night of PI on June 20th, one of the campers objected to calling PI a “camp” when they were all staying in a “hotel.” It was a good point, one the planning committee discussed after the conclusion of PI. More on this later.

Ten registrations were received prior to the start of PI. One registrant, a 7-year-old, backed out a few days before the actual start of PI. Her mother said the idea of staying with strangers away from home was too much to deal with. Arrangements for her to participate during the day and return home at night was offered, but that too was turned down.

Nine campers (5 boys and 4 girls) came for the start of PI at the Ortner Center on Sunday, June 20th. Several came with their parents. A seminar including the parents, campers, and some of the staff was held after dinner as mentioned above. We reviewed the schedule for the week and what we hoped the campers would get from the program. Following The seminar, the parents left and the Connie Daly, Sherrie Bruegman, Jamie Forbis, Maida Avdic, Rachna Keshwani, and myself engaged the campers in games and activities. Sherrie and Jamie Forbis left at 9:00. Overnight staff included Connie Daly, Maida Avdic, Rachna Keshwani, and myself. Most of the campers stayed up until lights out at 10:00.

The morning schedule (except for Monday, June 21st) was pretty much structured the same throughout PI. Breakfast took place at 7:00 each morning. After the campers were transported from the Ortner Center to the Lincoln district office at 8:00, the day began with a seminar led by Bob Deaton focused on blindness related topics and a preview of that day's activities. Following the seminar, each camper either went on a tour of work locations assigned to participants in WAGES or to skill classes in the areas of Braille, cane travel, cooking, or activities of daily living. The cooking class was 3-hours long. Other classes were 50-minutes long (with a 10 minute break between classes) and conducted under sleepshades with one-on-one instruction. NCBVI staff members who worked as instructors included Sherrie Bruegman (cooking), Amy Buresh (Braille), Kelly Coleman (cooking), Glenn Ervin (activities of daily living), Jamie Forbis (Braille), Elaine Kavulak (cane travel), and Larry Mackey (cane travel). Two volunteers also served as instructors - Andrea Chizek (Braille) and Laurie Plautz (activities of daily living). Larry Roos took two or three campers on tours of WAGES worked sites each day. Kathy Brown-Hollins supervised the morning program following the seminar.

As noted above, the schedule on the morning of Monday, June 21st was different. While three of the campers went with Larry Roos to tour WAGES work sites, the other campers participated in only one 50-minute class before joining Center staff members and students in a joint activity grilling hot dogs and hamburgers. PI campers contributed watermelon and apple crisp to the venture. That afternoon following the grilling activity, PI campers and Center students engaged in outdoor recreational activities including horseshoes and other yard games. Kite flying was plan, but unfortunately, there was no wind. Special appreciation is given to Center staff members and students for helping make this part of PI especially meaningful and enjoyable.

During the grilling activity, two of the campers were discovered to have head lice. A check of all other campers and staff working PI did not turn up any other cases. The two campers with head lice were sent home after lunch along with their belongings from the Ortner Center. The Ortner Center was notified, and a deep cleaning of the room occupied by the two campers was ordered. The counselor working with the two campers followed up to ensure that steps were taken to clean the home properly and treat the children.

Afternoon and evening activities were designed to challenge and educate as well as entertain. Following pizza at the student apartments on Monday, June 21st, PI staff members and campers watched "Toy Story III" with video description at the Lincoln Grand. On the afternoon of Tuesday, June 22nd, PI campers participated in a pottery workshop conducted by the Lux Center of the Arts. The projects created by the campers were kept to be baked in a kiln. Eventually, each camper got their creations back but not until some time after the conclusion of PI. Following the pottery workshop, the campers went swimming at the pool on the campus of Union College.

They then traveled to the downtown campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for dinner at Selleck Hall and a seminar with the WAGES students to talk about work and why it is important. On the afternoon of Wednesday, June 23rd, PI staff members and campers toured a local dairy farm and went roller skating. Following dinner at the Ortner Center, PI staff members and campers enjoyed a spirited talent show. NCBVI staff members and volunteers working the afternoon program included Sherrie Bruegman, Shane Buresh, Connie Daly, Bob Deaton, Glenn Ervin, Jamie Forbis, Elaine Kavulak, and Larry Roos. Volunteers Andrea Chizek and Laurie Plautz also worked most afternoons. Volunteers Maida Avdic and Rachna Keshwani, both students in the Center, joined PI activities following Center training in the afternoon.

Two campers complained of illness and stomach distress on Wednesday morning, June 23rd, severe enough to be sent home.

Many of the parents of PI campers were back for lunch at the conclusion of PI on Thursday afternoon, June 24th. Following lunch and remarks by Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Shane Buresh led an excellent seminar touching on many of the important considerations for preparing blind children for success in later life.

The PI planning committee met on July 22nd to review what went well and what didn't. The average age of the campers at PI was younger than usual, and that was something we did not anticipate this year. The agenda was pretty well developed by the time the registrations for PI came in. Consequently, some of the activities were not as age appropriate for many of the campers as might have been desired. For example, some of the younger kids seemed not to understand why they were touring work stations assigned to WAGES participants.

The tours focus too specifically on what WAGES participants did on the job and not enough on work itself in general. Part of the thinking, of course, is to expose PI campers to blind people working real jobs and help them think of themselves as blind people working in careers that interested them.

Perhaps, a more basic approach to understanding work and the different kinds of jobs people do would be better. Years ago, PI campers took field trips to different businesses such as animal centers, supermarkets, clinics, and the like to explore the range of jobs available within each institution. We could still plan a joint seminar with WAGES students to discuss why they chose the work experience they did and why work was important to them. That way, we could also discuss how blindness need not be a barrier in pursuit of careers they choose in later life.

Some of the activities were more challenging than beneficial. One of the objectives of PI is to raise expectations and challenge campers to do more than they thought they could or to get them out of their comfort zone. If, however, campers do not experience some level of success from the activity, then we have to question whether it was worth doing. Roller skating was one such activity. Most of the campers (and staff members) had a great deal of difficulty roller skating. While we had some skilled skaters in the group including Shane and one of the other campers, the rest of us, for the most part, were hugging the wall. This had less to do with age than with the level of skill in the group. It can be said that, because there were some competent blind skaters, they demonstrated that skating was something blind people can do. Still, the planning committee agreed that we can plan other activities that will allow more of a sense of accomplishment.

A few campers showed up without canes. Campers are expected to use their canes throughout the program, and the planning committee agreed that this understanding needs to be clearly stated in communications with counselors and the parents of campers before they arrive. That message will be included in the follow-up letter sent to the campers and their families about two weeks prior to the start of PI.

Sleepshades were issued to campers following the morning seminar on the first day. Sleepshades were used during skill classes in the morning, and there was some thought about using sleepshades during some of the activities later in the day, but keeping track of where sleepshades were when they weren't being used proved unmanageable. Mid-way through PI, the decision was made to collect sleepshades after classes before lunch and keep them all in one place until classes the next day. The planning committee decided to continue that practice next year.

There was one camper who cried for his mother almost continuously from the first night of PI until almost close to the end. This put a considerable strain on the camper and everyone around him. Staff members worked diligently to keep him distracted and occupied but this only lasted for short intervals. There was some feeling his behavior would improve as time passed, and to some extent, it did, but, while the emotional intensity subsided, the distress was still very apparent. This was not perceived as manipulative, attention-getting behavior. There was no discussion about letting him go home, but the wisdom of not allowing this has been called into question since then. In the future, we will still need to assess each individual situation, but if behavior such as experienced with this camper should come up again, the option of allowing the camper to return home will need to be considered.

Two campers were found to have head lice on the first day of PI. They returned home following lunch to the great distress of both, but to one in particular. It should be noted that there was an occurrence of head lice during WAGES in 2009. The planning committee thought we needed to be more proactive in the future, perhaps letting parents know that campers will be checked for head lice. Next year, the follow-up letter mentioned above will include a request that parents check their children for head lice since this is a concern.

Next year, efforts will be made to find a more camp-like environment. The staff at the Ortner Center at Union College was very accommodating and the facilities quite satisfactory. Still, a more rural environment with access to outdoor activities would be more age appropriate. Different facilities have been suggested, including lodges at Mahoney State Park and a 4-H camp near Gretna. These possibilities will be explored.

TABS 2010 Calendar

January 23rd (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

PARENTS & Junior/Senior High School Students Only

Topic: College Exploration & Information

Education Quest Information- Filling out FAFSA Forms - Scholarships

Panel: University & College Disabilities Office Staff

Panel: Blind Students Currently Attending a College or University

Representatives from ACB and NFB discussing their organizations and student

Divisions.

February 20th (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Be ACTIVE!!! Learn about exercise alternatives.

Lunch: Subs, Salads & Fruit (Buffet and making health choices)

March 20th (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Why does our appearance and mannerisms matter?

Lunch: Ham, Corn, Baked Potatoes, Bread/Butter
(Cooking Skills, cutting and eating skills)

April : TBD- Volunteer Activity

May 15th (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Responsibilities of Riding the Bus

Travel by bus to Old Country Buffett (75th & Dodge)

Alternatives & Techniques for going to a Buffett

June 8th (Tuesday) 10:00 a.m.

Old Market Scavenger Hunt

Shopping: Where/how do I find help?

July - NO MEETING

August 6th (Friday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Picnic in the Park: Grilling Skills

*** Families Invited***

September 11th (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Technology & Tools

Lunch: Lasagna, Salad, Bread & Brownies (cooking skills)

October 23rd (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Thanks-n-Treats for the Bus Drivers

Making Popcorn Balls, Cookies & Rice Krispie Treats

(The importance of giving back to your community and educating the public on the abilities of blind individuals)

November 20th (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Let's Get Crafty! Cornucopias & Fleece Blankets

Leisure time activities

December 28th (Tuesday) 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Descriptive Movie - Oak View Theaters & Lunch

(Bus and snow travel)

Teen Services in the Omaha District

Submitted by Nancy Flearl

August 3, 2010

TABS Planning Committee: We meet the end of December or first part of January to plan the activities of this group for the entire year. We have one counselor that is responsible for coordinating the monthly group, arrange transportation and inform staff of who is attending and if there are any changes to the schedule.

Planning Committee:

Kelly Coleman

Nancy Flearl

Kathy Brown-Hollins

Elaine Kavulak

NCBVI Staff Members working TABS throughout the year are planned to work, but may not necessarily need to with the use of volunteers and the number of participants:

Kelly Coleman

Nancy Flearl

Kathy Brown-Hollins

Carol Jenkins

Elaine Kavulak

Robert Newman

Nicole Schopen

Chad Weber

Volunteers:

Kristal Platt

Teresa Gregg

Paulette Montei

Rachna Keshwani

Amy Sweigard

John Gardner

Listed above are the individuals that have volunteered this year. There will be various other clients and former clients throughout the rest of the year.

Drivers:

Dan Byrd

Paul Terkelsen

We have two new drivers that will be assisting us: Sharon Vacanti and Doug Weed

We hold our Teens Adventures in Blindness (TABS) once a month with staff as a group to work on skills. These are group sessions with us working on independent living skills, pre-vocational skills, and social skills. We also participate in activities in the community utilizing their canes and accessing metro area transit.

This is important for individual to realize all the opportunities that are available to them in the community. The list of our activities for this year is attached.

We invite volunteers and confident employed adults that are blind to join us for these sessions. It is important for them and their families to have positive role models. With the school year being so busy, we usually meet Saturday mornings from 10:00-2:00. This allows us to have a good turnout, without students feeling conflicted about getting homework completed.

We do have a group of younger consumers which we will meet once a month after school, beginning with this school year. We will follow the same plans as with the TABS group. This will allow us to modify it easier and make these activities more age appropriate.

We then work with each student individual once a month to address individual skills specific to their needs and interest.

We do encourage parents to stay and observe, allowing them to experience how we teach and the importance of having high expectation for their child. We have had several parents that have chosen to do so.

We do encourage volunteerism and have that built into the schedule. We have for the past several years joined the United Way for National Youth Volunteer Day in April.

Students work with other teens from across the city to complete a volunteer activity.

This past year was promoting literacy at Westroads Mall. Our teens/students demonstrated Braille and educated the public on the techniques of blindness. The books for literacy were also available in Braille and our students read simultaneously in Braille.

So many of our activities build on the skills we have addressed previously and what they are receiving at school. They learn to work as teams, use good orientation skills and problem solving. They learn the importance of good social skills that are essential for school and work.

A Summation of the past year of the Fremont group teaching project

To the Members of the Commission Board and the Commission Management Team:

A long term relationship has flourished between the staff of NCBVI, primarily counselors from the Omaha district, and the vision department at Fremont High School, to provide social and blindness skill training opportunities for the blind youth of Fremont and the surrounding area. Within the past calendar year, changes have been introduced on both sides of the relationship, which in part is why a report of this group's activity is coming from a member of the Lincoln district of NCBVI. In the fall of 2009, it was determined that Dodge County and thereby Fremont, would begin being served by the Lincoln district beginning in 2010. During this same time frame, the 2009/2010 academic year, Kim Adams, former teacher of the visually impaired in Fremont, completed her transition into retirement and handed over the reins of the program to Mary Robinson. Kelly Coleman, participated in the monthly group meetings during this entire school year, while I first attended in December of 2009.

The group of four students that Mary has identified for participation in the after school sessions ranged in age from 8 to 19 years, although three of these students are middle school and above. Our group primarily meets in a family and consumer science classroom, however, this year we have also conducted community based sessions. It might be assumed by some, but it should be noted that when skills of daily living and mobility are being taught and performed, the students are instructed while under sleep shades.

As you might imagine, the curriculum of these sessions, which is planned at the beginning of each academic year, strives to provide opportunities for the youth to gain knowledge of and experience in, areas identified in the expanded core curriculum, knowledge of employment related topics and skills, alternative techniques for daily living independence, and attitudinal adjustment counseling through both philosophical discussions and social interactions with peers. In addition, much value and energy is placed in involving blind role models and other transitioning youth to help meet these goals. Along with myself, I am aware that during this past year, Amy Buresh and Chad Weber, also joined the group sessions as both commission staff and as blind adult role models. Many of these students having participated in these sessions for several years now, have no doubt been introduced to numerous blind persons and rich conceptual development based on our collective wisdom.

When I first joined the group in December of 2009, they were engaged in finishing the second in a two part instructional activity on baking cookies. Due to time constraints, the group had prepared and frozen the cookie dough during the November meeting. This allowed us during this session to focus on the skills involved with setting the oven, inserting and removing cookie trays and other related spatial concepts.

In our January session, we shifted focus to the acquisition of various home related cleaning skills. The students each took turns cycling through stations of mopping the floor, cleaning toilets, cleaning bathroom mirrors and fixtures and vacuuming.

The focus topic of the February group teaching was on the alternatives related to sorting and maintaining clothing without vision. We explored various tactual methods for knowing the colors of items. One of these was the use of purchasable metallic Braille labels which can be sewn into the

inside of a garment. It should be noted that each student also learned as a skill during this session, how to thread a needle and sew in a Braille tag, which is a direct transferable skill to sewing on buttons etc.

As March rolled around and the weather improved, it was time to move our session outdoors. We took the group to a local Fremont employer, Dairy Queen, to visit with the manager about work place expectations of employees and to see the inner working of a fast food operation. We were all amazed at the variety of skills employed by persons at Dairy Queen. While one tends to have a concept of what we believe a fast food worker might do, at a facility like Dairy Queen the roles and talents of employees are expanded. For example, each person is expected to take their turn at making dilly bars and designing and decorating the ice cream cakes. Incidentally, the manager who gave us the tour demonstrated ice cream cake construction for us, completing one in approximately three minutes.

One aspect of this session that I enjoyed was watching the students read and ask questions of the manager from Braille copies they had brought. This demonstrated to the manager an organizational preparedness and overall capability that they possess as young blind people, and truly sent the message that they could some day be individuals who could work in her store.

Our final session of the academic year was based on learning skills involved with cutting and preparing fruits and vegetables. The students learned non-visual techniques for slicing, dicing, peeling and chopping. We of course also took the time to dine on the assortment of strawberries, bananas, celery and carrots. Oh yes, and several of the students prepared fruit and ranch dips for dunking their masterpieces. During this session we also found the time to play a high spirited game of Braille scrabble.

As of this writing we do not yet have the entire agenda set for this next academic year. Mary and I or other NCBVI staff will finalize our plans during the first weeks of the school year. Be assured though that the collaborative foundation laid in the past will be the bedrock of what and why we will do what we do this next year. It is my hope that we can build student confidence and raise expectations of those in the Fremont group by the continued involvement of blind role models and the integration into the community of Fremont and society in general, whenever it is possible.

Let me conclude by saying that of course, we do continue to have monthly home visits with the students who attend the Fremont group teaching and all of these students have attended our various youth programs at the Commission to further their belief in themselves and of the blind in general.

Cordially yours,

Shane Buresh, O.C. Lincoln district

A Summation of the past year of the Lincoln Public Schools VIP Club

To the Members of the Commission Board and the Commission Management Team:

Our direct and continued involvement with the Lincoln Public Schools (VIP club), occurred innocently and auspiciously enough. In September of 2009, Amy Buresh and I were invited to be the keynote speakers at the inaugural group of the academic year. The focus topic was on the transition services we provide here at the Commission and our own personal transitional journeys from high school through college and on into the world of work. Of the 10 or so students who were present that evening, all but one or two have worked with us or attended various commission programs prior to this meeting. Several factors came together both during and following this session, which prompted us to attempt to foster a relationship with the organizers of the VIP club and to begin to attend and help shape these sessions.

The first of these factors was an incident that occurred prior to our speeches. The session was kicked off with an icebreaker activity, whereby students were given a set of questions on a hand out and then asked to traverse around the room and find out others answers to the questions. While this activity had great potential, Amy and I were disturbed to discover that the handout was only in large print, no Braille, and that there was only print writing utensils available for the students to use. This situation was compounded by the fact that when it came time to reveal responses that the students had written, only one student could read back what they had written independently, demonstrating publically that print was not the best medium for nearly everyone present. One of the students who is a Braille reader exclusively did complain during the activity and received the response that there was not enough time before the session to Braille the

material and that they would do better in the future. My purpose here is not to publically embarrass or criticize anyone, especially when we were merely guests of the program, but to illustrate our motivation for wanting to become more deeply involved with the sessions.

Simultaneously, a second factor emerged, the participants in our Saturday group teachings in the Lincoln district were beginning to change, primarily due to the aging out of several members with regards to their graduation from high school. Thus, we determined that for the 2009-2010 academic year we would try to attend the VIP club sessions at LPS and forego our regular Saturday group meetings. This seemed an affective method of service delivery with respect to our involvement in the Fremont group teaching (see other summation document), which allowed us to regularly meet the majority of our other youth in a group setting.

While as I understand it, the VIP club was established by LPS vision staff to provide social interaction and experiences for the visually impaired youth, the intent and purpose of its existence is much less rooted in skill acquisition than is the tradition of much of our programming. This will be reflected as I briefly outline our involvement during this past academic year.

Following our visit in September, Amy and I approached the LPS VIP club organizers and asked if we could attend the meetings, if nothing else to serve as blind role models. They found this to be an exciting proposition and we began attending in November 2009.

This first session, was probably the most skill based and familiar to us, of any of the sessions we attended. Diane Ditmars, teacher of the visually impaired for LPS and her husband Nole, provided the students a one of a kind experience. They took the students through the entire process of

making bread from wheat, using home style mechanical and traditional methods. While sleep shades were not used, the students were given opportunities to explore their own skills and abilities and were given an awesome glimpse into the past.

In January, we attended a movie at the Lincoln Grand using the Mopix descriptive movie system.

We went roller skating during the February session, which did afford me the opportunity to conduct some mobility cane travel instruction with several individuals. In addition, we had our own time at the skating rink which allowed students to feel free to try things out and expand their comfort zone. This activity in part inspired me to try and give our project independence students a similar experience.

In March, the focus of the group was on participation in game type activities, with an enfaces on how they might use the Nintendo Wi. Unfortunately, all the participants during this session were high partial individuals with regard to their visual functioning, consequently, the opportunity to explore the alternatives used by a person who had too low of residual vision to navigate the menus or play the games was not addressed. While the intent to help normalize the students with their peers is valid, I expressed my concern that the hierarchy of vision potentially demonstrated to some students that they were inferior due to having less vision. It is my hope to explore this activity further in the future to see if alternatives can be determined.

In April, the group participated in a walk for hunger which supports the LPS backpack program, which sends needy children home each weekend with a backpack full of survival foods. I told the organizers of VIP that this

activity was among what I considered to be of greatest value for the year. Firstly, each teaches the blind students the value in giving back and furthermore, there was plenty of mobility and other real world experience involved.

The year concluded with a fun evening at Champions Fun Center. This again afforded me the opportunity to impart some skills and suggestions for participation non-visually in such activities as, bowling, miniature golfing, video games, etc.

As we move forward into the next academic year, it is our plan and desire to not only, continue to participate but also, as rapport builds to begin to shape the activities that are being conducted each month in the VIP club. It should be noted that the relationships fostered are already paying dividends as we work together and secure equipment and services for the students in LPS.

In conclusion, we will once again be implementing Saturday group teaching involving all our students in the Lincoln district area, in addition to our continued participation in both the VIP and Fremont after school groups. During this past year we have seen an increase in students particularly in the younger age ranges, which hunger for skills and deserve programming to get to know one another and to broaden their experiences. It is our desire and hope that re-establishing Saturday sessions will be a valuable supplement to our monthly home visits and will push us closer to meeting these goals.

Cordially yours,

Shane Buresh O.C. Lincoln District

2010 WAGES

June 14th-July 23rd

Summary Report

Completed by Dustin Wardyn

July 29th, 2010

WAGES Staff:

Dustin Wardyn

Christina Tipkin

Michael Melchizedek

Mark Anderson

Rebecca Ledder

Maria Hernandez Legorreta (Conchita)

Laurie Plautz

Job Coaches:

Hubert Paulson

Myeisha Essex

Sarah Nelson

Suzanne Shackelford (interpreter)

Amy Mason

Seminar Speakers:

Dustin Wardyn-June 13th, 14th, 17th, July 13th and 22nd

Carlos Servan-June 15th

Bob Deaton-June 22nd

Shane Buresh-June 24th

Kelly Coleman-June 29th and July 1st

J.R. Poore-July 6th and 8th

Floyd Colon-July 15th

Fatos Floyd-July 20th

Twelve students (10 young men and 2 young women) participated in the 2010 WAGES program. (Unfortunately one of the WAGES students left the program after a week. Apparently he found his home life more convenient and he wasn't willing to continue with the program despite our many efforts.) The program started with a check in on June 13th and finished with a banquet on July 23rd.

Most of students were accompanied with counselors and job coaches for the first three days. Over the course of these three days the students interviewed with their employer, learned the walking/bus routes to and from work, and acquired the basic skills to start their employment. Only four students continued on with a job coach for the following weeks.

Two of those students were completely deaf and their job coach was also their interpreter. During the last two weeks of the program their job coach/interpreter left periodically so the students communicated directly with their supervisors. The remaining two students ceased to have job coaches after three weeks.

The students worked a variety of different jobs this year. This was also a year full of new employers. One student worked at the Mexican American Commission as a researcher. Another student worked at the Capital Humane Society cleaning kennels, walking dogs, and helping out with the television show "Critter Corner". We had a returning student working the same job as last year at the State Capital building. He worked as a tour guide and was very articulate and knowledgeable. Three students worked at St. Elizabeth's hospital (new employer). One student worked the front desk of Human Resources. This was arguably the most difficult of the jobs performed by our students this year. The student was responsible for directing questions from staff, answering telephones, configuring computer programs, creating step by step instructions for new software, and knowing all the protocols and regulations contributed to human resources. The other two students at St. Elizabeth worked with the landscaping crew. They started off with primitive tasks such as sweeping, pulling weeds, and pruning bushes. However as their supervisors gain trust in them they learned to edge the grass, paint outdoor fixtures, weed-eat, mow the grass, and blow grass trimmings. Two of our students had multiple places of employment. One of those students worked at the Suburban Extended Stay hotel in the mornings. He cleaned windows, vacuumed floors, and helped maintain the building. In the afternoons he worked at Lancaster County Records and Information Management. He was responsible for shredding documents, using a pallet jack, and discarding the remains. The other itinerant student worked in the kitchen at Aging Partners in the morning. He was responsible for labeling, food prep, and cleaning. In the afternoons he worked in the kitchen at Selleck Dining. He was responsible for cleaning, organizing, and placing all the dishware. We had one student work at CJ's Paintball (new employer).

This was a great match for the employer and the student. The student got to work at 10:30 in the morning and worked straight thru to 4:30 everyday. He was responsible organizing and cleaning all of the stores products. He was strongly involved in the reformatting of the store as well. One of our students worked at the Malone Community Center. She was responsible for teaching and observing students raging from the ages of 5 to 9. Finally we had one student work at Lincoln's Children Museum (new employer). This was a very successful outcome. The student was responsible for establishing a table within the Museum and introducing children to blindness. She brailed over 2,400 names for children, as well as teaching them to read Braille through games, flashcards, playing cards, and pictures.

Over the course of the program students also experienced a number of different activities. Starting on June 19th the students went to Mahoney State Park. The students swam, went paddle boating, and even went horseback riding. The students seemed to really enjoy the opportunity to ride the horses. On June 20th the students climbed the rock wall at the rec center on UNL's campus. We had three students make it to the top and one student made it twice. Over the next two weeks the students participated in making smoothies, going to paint yourself silly, and visiting exhibits on campus (such as Morrill Hall). On July 10th students had a cookout on campus. The sides were prepared by Selleck Dinning, however the students were responsible for learning how to cook their own burger over an open fire. On July 11th and students went to the Grand movie theater for a descriptive film. They watched "Eclipse" and despite their preconceived notions they all seemed to have really enjoyed it. On July 16th the students ate at Wasabi. They chose this restaurant and were very pleased to experience the many types of food offered there. On July 18th the students went to the Henry Doorly Zoo. Although many of our students were from the Omaha area, only a few had ever been there. The animal exhibits intrigued the students for the entire day. On July 20th the students went to the center for a tour led by Fatos Floyd. The students asked many questions regarding the different areas of the center.

After the tour the students were treated with a grill out, compliments of the center. Finally the program came to an end on the night of the banquet, July 23rd. As requested by the students, there was no keynote speaker present. Instead the students all came to the front, one by one, with their supervisor(s) and spoke about their experiences with their place of work. It was great to hear all of the positive perspectives from the students and employers.

2010 Spring Winnerfest

March 4th, 5th, and 6th

Summary Report

Completed by Bob Deaton,

April 6, 2010

Planning Committee:

Amy Buresh

Bob Deaton

Carol Jenkins

Denise Johnston-Rauterkus

Winnerfest staff:

Kathy Brown-Holins

Shane Buresh

Bob Deaton

Angie Hoff

Carol Jenkins

Becky Manning

Larry Mackey

John Schmitt

Guest Presenter:

Diane Ditmars - Vision Resource Teacher - Lincoln Public Schools

David Brandt - Office for Students with Disabilities - UNK

Guest:

Janet Rieck - Vision Resource Teacher - Columbus

Fifteen students (nine young men and six young women) participated in the 2010 Spring Winnerfest event at The Leadership Center in Aurora. The theme of the event was "Putting Your Best Foot Forward: Standing Up for Yourself."

Things got off to a fun start Tuesday night with a tie-dye activity coordinated by Carol Jenkins following dinner and opening preliminaries. Shane Buresh saved the day with a quick dash to Grand Island to replenish supplies when we realized we didn't have enough materials for everyone to complete a project. Further excitement was added that night when the water in one of the boys' rooms backed up necessitating a move to another room.

David Brandt, Office for Students with Disabilities at UNK, Brandt started things off the following morning with a discussion of what it takes to succeed as a college student with a disability. Diane Ditmars, Vision Resource Teacher with the Lincoln Public Schools, followed up with a similar discussion on the importance of being proactive while still in high school. Ms. Asked students to write down goals they would like to accomplish in the coming year.

After collecting what the students wrote, they were told that they can expect to get their goals back a year later in the mail, so they can check how well they did. That should be a trick since eight of the students are graduating this spring. Ms. Ditmars said that she will work with Shane and Amy Buresh to make sure everyone got their goals back, regardless of where they might be living.

Carol Jenkins and Angie Hoff led a discussion on how students can talk about their blindness in a positive way. Students broke up into pairs and took turns interviewing each other to learn positive things about their partners to report to the rest of the group. The students also put on skits to demonstrate how a negative can be turned into a positive.

Kathy Brown-Holins and John Schmitt led a discussion on what employers look for in a new employee. Common questions employers ask were reviewed, and the students considered how such questions can be answered in ways that put them in the best possible light. Mock interviews were conducted to highlight do's and don'ts in a job interview.

Carlos Servan talked about Winnerfest following dinner. It was very apparent that interest in WAGES among the students is high.

The students then put on a talent show with Shane Buresh as master of ceremonies. There is certainly no lack of talent, imagination, or creativity in this group.

Saturday morning started with a review of a speech by Kenneth Jernigan, "On the Nature of Independence," that was well received.

Bob Deaton then led a discussion on how aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, and assertive communication styles help or hinder us in our relations with others.

Shane Buresh wrapped up Winnerfest with a send off for graduating seniors. As noted above, eight students will be graduating this year, the highest turnover I can recall. Many of the other students asserted that they will be back in November.

I want to Comment on the degree of versatility and spirit of teamwork displayed by everyone working Winnerfest. Amy Buresh and Denise Johnston-Rauterkus have been integral to the smooth operation of Winnerfest for many years. This time, Amy had other obligations that precluded her being at Winnerfest this time, and Denise had to step back because of illness. Some fast thinking and decision-making about who did what when had to be made. Everyone kept their cool and Winnerfest turned out to be a positive experience for everyone involved as usual.

I should also mention that Janet Rieck, Vision Resource Teacher from the Columbus area, was there as an observer. We have had observers representing public schools before, and this has always turned out well. Ms. Rieck reported that she had talked to most all of the staff members at Winnerfest and was impressed at how positive the program was. She said that she will definitely help recruit students for Winnerfest in the future.

Becky Manning, Vocational Rehabilitation Technician in the Kearney office, is completing her undergraduate study in Social Work at UNK this semester. She attended Winnerfest as part of her internship.