

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

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

Lincoln, 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.

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

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made. It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. DaVinci's will deliver pizza and salad for lunch. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting.

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

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

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR, Lincoln; Fatos Floyd, Director Nebraska Center for the Blind, Lincoln; Connie Daly, District Supervisor, Lincoln; Jeff Altman, Orientation Counselor, Lincoln; Nancy Coffman, Technology Specialist, Lincoln; Jan Brandt, Technology Specialist, North Platte District; Larry Oleson, Technology Specialist, Omaha; Monica Tripp; Staff Trainee for VR Counselor, Omaha; Linda Cain, Staff Trainee for Apartment Resource Counselor, Lincoln.

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, NCBVI Contractor; ACB Lincoln Chapter - Terry Brennförder, Chris Brennförder, Don Pohlmann and Janice Shafer; ACB Omaha Chapter - Shirley Allen, Barbara Epworth, Carol Gibilisco, Howard Compton, Janis Compton, Mark Bulger, Sherryl Rissi, Ann Lynch-Pelikan, Gwen Michalek, Katie Redenbaugh and Glennie Weiland; Pat Fischer, Accessibility.Net; Chris Turner, NFB North Platte.

Minutes of the August 14, 2010 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the August 14, 2010 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Oltman noted that the Minutes are located on the NCBVI website for review.

Focus Topic: Technology Services – NCBVI’s Tech Team – Introduction by Carlos Serván with Jan Brandt, Nancy Coffman and Larry Oleson presenting

Carlos Serván noted that information regarding NCBVI technology services was forwarded to the commissioners prior to today's meeting. The documents are:

1. Technology services description.
2. Technology guidelines.
3. Technology at the Nebraska Center for the Blind.
4. Policy on digital books
5. Policy on note-takers
6. Equipment tracking policy
7. Return of use equipment policy
8. Assistive Technology Partnership participation
9. PILBO grant proposal.

The documents are attached to the end of the Minutes.

Carlos Serván noted that a client is present at today's meeting to talk about the services she has received from NCBVI. Also, letters received from several clients who could not attend today's meeting will be read into the record for today's meeting.

Carlos Serván gave a background of the technology services provided by NCBVI. In the past NCBVI did not provide technology to clients unless they were in the field of computers. Previously it was thought that the employer should provide the technology to the clients who work for them.

This was sometimes a battle as it could take a while for the employer to get the equipment. Therefore, it was decided that NCBVI would purchase technology for clients on an individual basis depending on the situation. At one point it was the thought that NCBVI was being too liberal on providing technology. At this time, NCBVI guidelines and/or policies were developed. These guidelines and/or policies are flexible, since all Vocational Rehabilitation services must be individualized.

Laurie Plautz was present to speak about the services she has received from NCBVI. Laurie reported that she has been a client for twelve years. Laurie reported that her occupation has been in the upholstering area and she has had her own business for approximately 27 years. Seventeen years ago Laurie was diagnosed with Stargardt's Disease so she knew there were going to be some changes in her life along the way. As the disease progressed she realized that she needed services. As her business slowed, she realized she needed to apply for a job working for someone else. It was difficult for her to fill out applications so she called NCBVI and Connie Daly and Shane Buresh came to visit her and help her find employment. Laurie stated she briefly worked at Duncan Aviation. She said this was very difficult for her and she realized she wanted to continue working in her upholstery business. Laurie stated that Connie Daly encouraged her to stay with the job she knew and enjoyed. Connie Daly encouraged her to learn to use a computer so she could do her paperwork electronically. After about a year Laurie bought herself a computer and learned Talking Typing Teacher and JAWS. Nancy Coffman worked very diligently with her in teaching her how to use her computer. Laurie stated that in her business she is now able to contact customers via email. She now has all her business forms on the computer and she can communicate with email on invoicing, estimates, etc. Laurie stated that the technology training that she has received has greatly helped her remain independent.

Commissioner Hansen asked Laurie about the other aspects of her business such as the physical upholstery. Commissioner Hansen asked if NCBVI has assisted her with helping her with those aspects as well.

Laurie stated that Deanna Jesse taught her to use a special camera which did help her when the magnifiers no longer worked. Laurie stated that she has learned to use her sewing machine non-visually in order to accomplish the tasks she needs to.

Laurie reported that her computer skills have also helped her in other ways. Last summer she worked under Carlos Serván in the WAGES Program. If she had not had computer skills she does not feel that she could have done that job.

The commissioners thanked Laurie for sharing her story.

Nancy Coffman stated that two clients who were planning to attend today's meeting are working today at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Behavioral Research Survey Center. Nancy stated that she did receive a written letter from Nancy Cramer. For informational purposes, the letter is pasted here:

I would like to share with you the experience I have had with Nancy Coffman, Connie Daly and The Commission of Visually Impaired.

In August of 2003 I took the initiative to contact Larry Andelt at the call center for the BRFSS to inquire about getting hired as a phone interviewer. Larry was very open-minded and said that he did not want to say whether or not it would be possible for me to do the job but would rather defer to my judgment and resourcefulness to make it work. I immediately contacted

Connie and she set out to help me apply through Kelly Services, which was the employment venue they were using at the time for gathering applicants. Connie provided the necessary support and guidance as I worked through my application. Connie and Nancy visited the call center and determined that JAWS would work with the BRFSS computer system.

Next Nancy and I then spent exhaustive hours working at the call center to set up scripting and then practicing the documenting of BRFSS surveys with JAWS. I worked this experiment for no pay from the call center. Nancy and I experimented with different key strokes to make it easier for me to accomplish the job. Nancy and I worked long and hard to implement scripting and coding requirements necessary for me meet BRFSS standards for completing surveys with accuracy while beating the time measurements necessary to be competitive with sighted employees.

Nancy Coffman was relentless in working with me to make this job work. My feeling was that if I did my part, she would go to whatever extent necessary to make this job endeavor a big success.

Connie and Nancy have offered training, support and the financial help, i.e.; home computer, to help me be successful. Any problem that I have had or any updates or adjustments that have been required at the BRFSS call center have been addressed promptly and completely by Nancy and Connie.

I am very grateful for the past support and continuing support that I have received.

It is a fact that not only has securing this job been a success for me to develop a career, but it has opened the door of opportunity for other visually impaired individuals.

I have been working when the BRFSS director, Larry Andelt, has given tours to CDC, (Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, GA.), officials. During those tours he has commented on the fact that the visually impaired employees that are working very well for the system. The long reaching effects of my employment have not only reached locally, but nationally.

Thank you so very much!

NANCY CRAMER

Director Van Zandt read into the records the letter from Karen Lemmon and Jolene Boshart. The letters are pasted below:

Logistically it does not work for me to attend the meeting which will be held on Saturday, November 6 in Lincoln. I do know however that one of the issues you will be working with is the technology that is offered by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I am a client of the Commission and would like to comment on how the NCBVI has helped me by working with me and providing to me current technological support.

When I began to lose my sight at the age of 46, I was quite settled into my 18th year of teaching High School Students. My teaching career had enjoyed many turns in direction and I was diversified enough in my education to enjoy each assignment. My true love in teaching was working with students in computer graphics. Because this area is so visual, as my sight deteriorated it became impossible to maintain my own expectations of what my classes had to offer.

Along with many of my other hobbies and interests I felt that I would have to give up the computer entirely. I had no idea that a computer could be successfully operated by not using vision! The NCBVI helped me obtain the necessary hardware and software to continue to use the computer. Jan Brandt, who has displayed to me the patience of Job, provided me the necessary lessons to learn to operate the computer. Today I use the computer everyday, sometimes more than once a day, to stay in touch with the world through email and Newline and the Internet. I use it for research for my part time summer job at fort Robinson where I have written the historical tours for the Nebraska game and Parks and also have given the tours for many years. I also utilize the computer with my work for the National Federation of the blind. On a more personal level, I find recipes, which are conveniently read to me and I use it often to help me find music for my church as I enjoy singing and can no longer read the hard copy music.

The NCBVI has not only helped me with the computer technology, but many other things as well. I use the open book often and it has been a mainstay in my study to become a Medical Transcriptionist. I also have benefited from technology through the NCBVI as they helped me obtain a portable CCTV which I utilize at my work and in my home. Sadly enough though a tool that I truly hoped to master, the PACMATE, became faulty and I did not reap the advantages of this tool. I intended to have the convenience of the PACMATE in my part time work with Fontenelle tours in designing bus tours My goal was to be able to keep the scheduling of those tours, addresses and phone numbers in a quick and convenient referral place. . Unfortunately this technology which Jan had so diligently worked with me on perfecting became flawed in the keyboard and we were told at the NFB Convention that it would probably not be feasible to pursue its repair. This of course is an inconvenience and an irritant, but certainly does not reflect on the wonderful services provided by the NCBVI.

I give full credit to the Nebraska commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired for getting me to the place I am now. I will continue my part time work, but now I will be entering a new chapter of teaching to our future teachers at Chadron State College. I will take what I have learned from Jan and through the commission to this classroom. My students will understand as they go to the K-12 classrooms what is available to blind and visually impaired students as far as technology. I will demonstrate what I have learned to them and provide resources to them. I will be emphasizing the work of the NCBVI in our State and hope to impress on these future teachers, the wonderful work that you do.

I hope that the NCBVI will continue its work and know the importance of having technology provided to the blind. It is our link to our independence and our connection to the outside world. . Had the NCBVI not come to my rescue and provided me with the hardware and the knowledge to operate it, I would not be able to do the things that I do and work along side sighted people. I truly thank you for your work as I never would have thought that I would be teaching non visual techniques and technology at a college level a decade ago. I will be pursuing this direction and it is good to know that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is standing ready with such very capable people to help the blind and visually impaired. Please keep up the good work of providing technology to the blind and visually impaired. I truly believe it is the most important work you do in providing independence to the blind.

A very sincere thank you!

Karen Lemmon

To Whom It Concerns:

My first introduction to "technology services," if you want to call them that, was when I first attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in 1971. At that time, NCBVI was actually Services for the Visually Impaired, and my counselor there provided me with a new Perkins Braille and a manual typewriter, which I faithfully carried from class to class whenever I needed to take a test. I also used the slate and stylus to take all of my classroom notes--a technology medium which I use to this day in my job as a telephone interviewer for the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

NCBVI also played a big part technologically in setting up my company, J. B. Translations, in 1995 after I stopped teaching Braille and computer at the Orientation Center. They furnished me with a Thiel Braille printer, JAWS speech, and OpenBook scanning software. I could never have made J. B. Translations the successful entity it is today without their help. When I also took on a part-time job as a telephone interviewer, JAWS again played an integral part in making that job accessible for me. Many people, including Nancy Coffman, Connie Daly and Larry Mackey, provided support for those of us who work there as blind people. Nancy Coffman has come to the job site on innumerable occasions to script our program, and tweak it so it works effectively for us.

Probably the most meaningful contribution technologically from NCBVI was when they helped buy a used BrailleNote note-taker for me. Throughout my experience with them, NCBVI counselors have demonstrated a strong commitment to Braille and accessible technology. This BrailleNote helped to fulfill one of my lifelong dreams--to be able to go to the library (or a web site) and get the book I wanted to read when I wanted to read it.

Of course, this is not perfect yet, but sites such as WebBraille and BookShare are making great strides toward the fulfillment of this goal.

NCBVI's counselors and staff have worked throughout my technological experience to provide me with excellent technology support and services; I am truly appreciative of their consistent commitment to making life more accessible to those of us who are blind in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

Jolene Boshart, CEO,

J. B. Translations

The Technology Specialists each gave a report.

Larry Oleson – Larry works out of the Omaha District NCBVI Office. A lot of the technology that they work with is new and some of it has been around for a while. Technology is constantly changing and there is always the need for education. As a lot of technology changes so does the accessible technology equipment that we use in addition to that. The most recent change has been Windows 7 coming out. A lot of companies are moving towards Windows 7. Much of the new software is quite different that Windows 3 in that they use ribbons. Technology is truly an ongoing education. NCBVI provides the services to help clients learn new software. A new Eye Pal is currently out as well as Pro Camera. Larry noted that sometimes the new technology is wonderful and it promises a lot. Yet, in reality it falls short. The NCBVI Technology Specialists work to find alternative methods to get the information needed for clients to do their job.

Nancy Coffman – Nancy works out of the Lincoln District Office. Nancy noted that the Pacmate had an update this year and she thinks that the hardware is going to have to be updated because it is very difficult to find a memory card. Nancy said she also thinks that with equipment such as Netbooks, Blue Tooth and Braille Displays, NCBVI will need to move individuals to that direction. This is partly because this technology is not as expensive. Nancy noted that there are many advantages to going to mainstream technology. For individuals who prefer Braille input, options are also becoming available using mainstream technology. Nancy noted that there are constantly many new things about technology to learn.

Chairperson Johnson asked how NCBVI helps a client choose between all of the different brands and products that are available.

Jan Brandt – Jan works out of the Kearney office in the North Platte District. Jan stated that if an individual happens to live in a metropolitan area such as Omaha or Lincoln, there are places such as Assessibility.Net and Magnification Resources that have showrooms where you can actually see what is available. Statewide there is a program called AT 4 All. The Website is at4all.com. If you sign up at the website, they have a lot of devices available for loan or demonstrations. Sometimes this means that individuals can borrow something for 30 days and give it a try.

Carlos Serván stated that he also promotes clients to join a blindness organization such as ACB or NFB and talk to other blind people about what technology they like.

Commissioner Hansen asked if it would be safe to say that if a client came to them today and they need screen reading or screen enlargement software that there is a default answer given that there are products that staff are most familiar with.

Larry Oleson noted that each product has their pros and cons. NCBVI uses a checklist to determine what the client needs to do the job.

Fatos Floyd stated that the Center uses JAWS for speech software. They also teach other screen readers if individuals are interested. Fatos noted that all of the computers have JAWS. When she was in Missouri they used Window Eyes. Fatos stated that she feels that people tend to teach the product they are most familiar with. Fatos noted that one product is not necessarily promoted over the other, but because everyone uses the product we have a tendency to recommend it.

Jan Brandt noted that the magnification programs have a lot less of a learning curve and therefore we do use a lot of different magnification programs.

The commissioners thanked the Technology Specialists for the information they received during today's Focus Topic.

Public Comment

Howard Compton – The American Council of the Blind of Nebraska presented a letter to go on record for today's meeting. The letter is being transferred in both Braille and large print. Howard Compton stated that he has been asked by his counsel to present this letter to the NCBVI Board of Commissioners. Howard Compton read the letter into the record and it is pasted below.

November 5, 2010

Ms. Julie Johnson, Chairperson

Board of Commissioners

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

4600 Valley Road, Suite 100

Lincoln, NE 68510-4844

To All Commissioners;

In early 2009, while the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) was planning the second Job Fair in Omaha, allegations and innuendos of discrimination and abuse of blind employees at Outlook Nebraska, Inc. (ONI) were made public by Nancy Oltman, former Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners of NCBVI. Based on those allegations and innuendos the Commissioners voted to rescind the invitation and Outlook Nebraska, Inc. was denied the privilege of participating in the 2009 Job Fair. Even though communication was received in February 2010 that the safety issues were resolved to the satisfaction of OSHA, for reasons we do not understand, NCBVI continued to cease referral of job applicants to ONI until recently.

It was then announced at the November 21, 2009 meeting of the NCBVI Board of Commissioners by Jeff Altman, the First Vice-President of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, and Lincoln Chapter member, that the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Inc. (NFBN) had undertaken legal action against ONI for alleged substandard wages, unsafe substandard working conditions, abuse and discrimination. It was further

mentioned that NFBN would like to discourage the placement of people in that facility until the issues are resolved. Concerned by this statement without supporting fact to bolster the claim, Commissioner Jim Jirak privately encouraged Jeff Altman to seek a “structured negotiation” so as not to exhaust financial resources that could better the lives of blind Nebraskans. At the February 6, 2010 Commissioners Board meeting, a statement was read by the NFBN designee that the claim is being investigated. NFBN President Amy Buresh, made another statement that since the filing of the EEOC suit by NFBN “another employee has been let go and we feel that action, represented retaliation for the employee’s advocacy for himself and others. I urge you to keep these things in mind when making any decisions affecting the company and any placement of clients at that entity.” (See the February 2010 Commissioners Board Minutes posted on the NCBVI web site.)

Soon after this statement was read, Commissioner Jirak immediately expressed concern about the lack of facts presented to bolster the accusation that warrant an EEOC case and further went on record as not supporting the litigation. Additionally, several ACBN members in attendance also expressed concern about the contents of the statement and further expressed concern about the attempt by NFBN to sway NCBVI’s board one way or the other. To the credit of Commissioner Darrel Walla regarding the letter from NFBN signed by President Amy Buresh and in his own words “I find this letter repugnant.” The NFBN designee found himself in an uncomfortable situation with few answers.

In early August, prior to the August 14, 2010 Commissioners Board meeting in Hastings, Nebraska, Commissioner Jirak learned the EEOC case filed by NFBN was adjudicated in favor of ONI. At this meeting, NFBN designee Mike Hanson was asked the status of the EEOC case. Mr. Hansen responded “Not much has changed regarding that situation.” (See the August 14, 2010 NCBVI board meeting minutes.) To the best of our

knowledge as of this date NFBN did not exercise its option and file for an appeal with the EEOC. ACBN is very concerned that NFBN was able to convince the NCBVI Commissioners Board to act against ONI without benefit of law. In fact, NFBN acted as Judge, Jury and Executioner.

It has been proven NFBN does possess the ability to sway a Nebraska State Agency as we have seen here. It is ACBN's position that NFBN has the right to file an EEOC case to defend against discrimination in the work place. However, NFBN does not have the right to tarnish the reputation of a Nebraska Company without the benefit of that company's day in court!

We in ACBN are requesting the following issues to be addressed and policies written by NCBVI, in consultation with the Commissioners Board that all employees and consumer advocacy groups are to abide by in the future.

First, any employee of NCBVI, or Commissioner of NCBVI, regardless of affiliation with an advocacy organization can not use their influence and lobby the clients of NCBVI to join or not to join an advocacy organization.

Second, in the event that charges of any kind are filed against an individual or company in the state of Nebraska, neither NCBVI nor the NCBVI Commissioners Board act positively or negatively until the case and all of the appeals have been adjudicated.

Third, in the event an advocacy organization attempts to cause NCBVI or the NCBVI Commissioners Board to act negatively toward an individual or Nebraska Company, that organization will be censured for a period of six

months from presenting its desires in any form to NCBVI or the Commissioners Board.

Fourth, we think it would be prudent to change the policies regarding employees belonging to advocacy groups. We feel that membership in any advocacy group that lobbies the NCBVI are a conflict of interest. We ask the question, "How can NCBVI be fair and impartial when employees Jeff Altman, Amy Buresh, Bob Deaton, Fatos Floyd, Carol Jenkins, Carlos Servan, Cheryl Livingston, Shane Buresh, Jamie Forbis, Mary Davis, Sahar Hussein, Robert Newman, Cathy Brown-Hollins, Nancy Coffman and Chad Weber are NFBN members. We believe there are others but can not identify them at this time. In addition to Commissioner Hansen, Commissioners Oltman and Walla are NFBN members, as well.

Finally, ACBN is requesting a written response from Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and the Commissioners Board of NCBVI by December 15, 2010, explaining in detail, how and when the above four (4) issues will be addressed and implemented.

In closing, it is the opinion of ACBN that the NCBVI Commissioners Board and NCBVI acted improperly and did not follow the principle of law so dear to the American Justice system, "We are all presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law".

In meeting assembled on October 20, 2010 this letter was unanimously adopted by the Executive Board of ACBN.

Sincerely,

Jim Jirak, President

Glendora Weiland, Vice-President

Shirley C. Allen, Recording Secretary

Howard B. Compton, Treasurer

Janice Shafer, Corresponding Secretary

Terry Brennfoerder, Lincoln Chapter Rep.

Barbara Epworth, Omaha Chapter Rep

Howard Compton stated that he is pleased to say that every member of this Board who agreed to this letter is present at today's meeting.

Jeff Altman, First Vice President, NFBN: Jeff stated that he wanted to provide some clarification. Jeff stated that the letter misstated the statement he made in November 2009. Jeff stated that at no time did he say NFBN was accusing Outlook Nebraska of the things listed in the letter. Jeff said he mentioned that these were common things that occurred in Sheltered Workshop situations. Also, in regard to EEOC, it is public knowledge that a Right to Sue Letter has been issued and legal action is being taken by the NFBN. NFBN is an advocacy organization with full rights to present their views and their interests to NCBVI. Jeff clarified that NCBVI is a separate organization of the State of Nebraska. NCBVI is not beholden to either consumer organization other than to hear their concerns and to then act upon those concerns according to what they believe to be the best interests of blind individuals of Nebraska. In regard to the legal action that is under way, those who have questions are welcome to contact Scott LaBarre who is the attorney for NFBN in this case.

Fatos Floyd: Fatos spoke as a staff person for NCBVI. Fatos stated that the letter talked about the belief and the justice system of this country. As a naturalized citizen of this country, Fatos stated that she believes in the American Constitution which gives her the right as a citizen to belong to any organization that she wants. Fatos stated she belongs to a Turkish organization, she is a Democrat and she belongs to NFB. Fatos stated she is proud of this and she feels no one has a right to tell her what organization in her private time that she can belong.

Connie Daly: Connie stated that it is the policy of NCBVI as it relates to Outlook Nebraska is the same as they are for any employer.

If a client is interested in applying for a job at Outlook Nebraska they are given an opportunity and NCBVI will help them to obtain employment at Outlook. During the time that the law suit between NFBN and Outlook Nebraska has been going on, several NCBVI clients have applied for jobs at Outlook.

Commissioner Nancy Oltman: Commissioner Oltman stated that because at the time this was all taking place she was the Chairperson of NCBVI. Oltman stated that if clients of NCBVI or other blind people in the community have complaints or questions that they feel the Board should be aware of, they are contacted. Oltman stated that she was contacted by five different employees of Outlook Nebraska and they each told her a separate story about their employment at Outlook Nebraska. Because of this situation she felt that it was proper for the Board to go to Outlook Nebraska to see what was actually going on. The Board did visit Outlook and did speak to the manager about questions they had. Several of the questions were answered, but everything was not answered to her expectations. The Board's decision at that time was to leave it in the hands of Nancy Flearl and Robert Newman who are NCBVI employees in the Omaha office to keep closer contacts with Outlook Nebraska and the Board very willingly put it in their hands. However, when the Board receives complaints she feels it is their job to look into it. Oltman stated that at no time did the Board say that NCBVI could not send clients to Outlook Nebraska for employment.

Commissioner Darrell Walla: Commissioner Walla stated that this is a democracy and at the time the Board voted to not let Outlook participate in the Employment seminar, he felt that Outlook should still be allowed to come. Walla stated that it was a 3 to 2 vote of the Board and this is the way a democracy works. Walla stated that he did not feel an apology was needed. The Board looked at the facts.

Carlos Serván: Carlos mentioned that since his name was mentioned in the letter from ACBN he wants to echo what Fatos stated. This is a country that was founded in freedom with assembly and he has the right to belong to anything even if the agency tells him not to do it, he will do it because it is illegal to force him not to. Carlos stated that as NCBVI Deputy Director, there were a few times that he talked to counselors and informed them that he did not feel we need to send our clients to such a business. Carlos stated that there are other businesses besides Outlook that he feels does not believe in the skills of blind people. Carlos stated that it is not just things that we do with Outlook Nebraska, but we do the same thing with other businesses. As far as Outlook, NCBVI did not stop referring clients there. NCBVI just does not close these cases as successful.

Chairperson Julie Johnson: Chairperson Johnson stated that the only action that the Board has ever taken in regard to Outlook Nebraska is the vote to not allow them to attend the Employment Workshop. This was a vote by the Board and a majority decision that it was not in the clients' best interest to have Outlook Nebraska at the workshop. Johnson stated that she voted not to have Outlook Nebraska at the Employment Workshop because there were too many questions in her mind and she needed to have more information before she felt comfortable in promoting people being employed there. This is not a legal decision, but an opinion based decision. Therefore, she does not feel there was a need for a legal due process for proof of anything.

Commissioner Mike Hansen: Commissioner Hansen stated that one of the things Eric was upset about when he spoke to the Board in February of last year was that when NCBVI closes a case for a client that was placed at Outlook Nebraska, the case is closed unsuccessfully. This is because of the type of employer that Outlook Nebraska is.

This is not negative. Outlook Nebraska is not integrated competitive employment because Outlook is working underneath laws that help them operate and they have to have a certain percentage of blind employees. This is why Outlook Nebraska is not a competitive employer and this is why cases are closed as unsuccessful. Being closed as unsuccessful is not meant to be a negative thing, but it is the way that the federal law is written.

Outlook Nebraska has employees from both Nebraska and Iowa. In Iowa, the agency for the Blind does not close their cases as unsuccessful when a client goes to work at Outlook Nebraska. This is because Iowa has a different interpretation of how that law is written. Hansen stated that he is not a lawyer, but he believes NCBVI is doing the proper thing. This is not meant to be negative.

Hansen stated that he would like to echo what a few others have said today about membership in organizations. As professional adults, we need to be able to separate different aspects of our lives. Staff members may have their responsibilities to NCBVI and separate responsibilities to NFB. These responsibilities can co-exist but they need to be separated. Hansen stated that that this also happens within the Commission Board. The roles must be separated apart.

Commissioner Walla: Commissioner Walla noted for the record that he is a member of both NFB and ACB.

Janis Compton: Janis reported that she is currently employed at Outlook Nebraska and she is happy working there. Janis noted that as in any workplace there will be people who are happier or less happy for various reasons. Janis stated that she knows that the majority of employees at ONI are happy, contented and pleased with their position.

Executive Director Pearl Van Zandt: Van Zandt noted for the record that NCBVI counselors do not just refer our clients to employers for jobs, but we send them to businesses that meet their employment goal. Van Zandt reported that the status of the closure is not the business of the employer to know.

Commissioner Jim Jirak: Commissioner Jirak noted that Jeff Altman may want to go back and read the November 2009 Minutes because his statement about Outlook Nebraska is there.

Commissioner Jirak again requested that the letter from ACBN be made a part of the record of today's meeting.

Jeff Altman: Altman asked Pearl and Carlos if they could explain what happens to Social Security money when the agency has an unsuccessful closure. When NCBVI has a successful closure, they receive reimbursement from Social Security.

Carlos Serván: Carlos stated that Social Security does not care about the terms successful and unsuccessful; they care about how much money the client is earning.

Jeff Altman: Altman asked that the part of the November 2009 minutes that were referred to be corrected. Stephens noted that if the statement is a part of the record it cannot be changed.

Break – A break was taken at 10:50 a.m. The meeting resumed at 11:05 a.m.

Report from the Chair

Chairperson Julie Johnson reported that she continues to attend her local VIPS meetings where she develops relationships. Johnson also attends meetings of the Lions Club. Johnson asked if any of the other commissioners had any information they wished to share.

Commissioner Jim Jirak reported that a couple of weeks ago he attended the Manager and Employee of the Year Ceremony at the State Capitol. Honored at this ceremony were Omaha District Supervisor, Nancy Flearl and Omaha VR Counselor Robert Newman. Jirak noted that a nice lunch was held for them after the ceremony.

Commissioner Nancy Oltman reported that she continues to attend the Networking conference calls. These calls are held every other month.

Report from the Executive Director

Van Zandt verbally gave highlights of her report and she thanked the Commissioners for their time. The entire report of the Executive Director is pasted below.

Executive Director's Report – November 6, 2010

Staffing Update

Linda Cain and Monica Tripp both came on board September 27th and are in Center training. Lin worked for us in the past as VR Counselor in North Platte. She was hired as the Center Apartment Resource Counselor. Monica was hired for Omaha as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Dave Robinson's position has been reclassified as Accountant II; we will still internally use the term Personnel Officer. The change is parallel; both job titles cover different aspects of his role. We are working on revisions to other positions, and are in communication with State Personnel about the changes.

Field Services

For Federal Fiscal Year 2010 (October 1, 2009 through September 30, 2010), we served 515 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. 35 were closed having achieved their employment goals. 67 were closed without achieving employment. In the Independent Living (IL) track, we served 930 clients in all statuses. 376 were closed successfully. 69 were closed without achieving their goals.

Center Services

Total Full-time Clients served from 1996 through November, 2010: 184. 86 percent achieved their employment goal. 104 in Competitive Employment; 23 are Home Makers. 36 are still students. Eleven percent are not working.

Activities in August: clients enter baked goods to County fair. They also did duct tape projects, making various items from Duct Tape;

Toured Homestead National Monument, which has worked with us to become fully accessible; Candle making activity.

September: Boating, fishing, high rope and low rope team building activity;

A visit from Sinan, the leader of Young Guru Academy from Turkey;

Applejack festival;

Dinner at Fatos's house for the clients and the new staff

October: Prairie Walk;

Carving pumpkins;

Soup activity buffet practice;

NFB State Convention.

Deputy Directors and North Platte District

FYI (September 27-30) - 9 people participated - the oldest participants was 95-years-old

Deanna Jesse reported on OIB activities at the NFBN state convention (October 29-31) - She made her report at the NFBN Senior Division meeting Friday afternoon and during general session on Saturday morning

Deanna Jesse and Sarah Stewart represented NCBVI at the Nebraska Ophthalmologic Association convention in Kearney on October 15.

Omaha District Update

We have hired Monica Tripp who will be replacing Robert Newman as he retires at the end of December. Monica started her training on September 27th and is slated to start in the Omaha office on January 24th. I hope the board shares with me in thanking Robert for 36 years of service. By the time he retires it will be 37!

We have had several clients receive job offers, one is working in the area of child care and the other is a couple with customer service positions (St. Paul's Child Care, WEST, Apogee). We have had several others with promising interviews. There are a number of new businesses moving into Midtown area and we have been in contact as they begin hiring.

We have had an increased number of individuals interested in center training and have been or in the process of completing their three day stay.

Our VR referrals have been up several individuals in job jeopardy, several younger veterans and 3-4 new immigrants from Burma. We have several doctors that are routinely making referrals which is encouraging. IL referrals have leveled off.

Our group teaching sessions for youth/teens have been working on making cookies. They will be distributing them to bus drivers and take a plate to the Metro Bus Office.

This will be the last month for our older blind group teaching. We have had a family day with a potluck so family are able to learn of the skills the participants have learned while involved with the program. This has been a dynamic group.

Some of our Omaha clients have been participating in the Lincoln Placement Class on Friday Afternoons.

We have had a staff person that was out part of July and all of August and others that have taken vacation; this has made it a very busy time.

Staff has been receiving training in EFORCE for IL paperwork. We can't thank Dottie enough for her time and patience.

Project Search will be starting in the Columbus area and initial meetings for this project were on October 6th.

We have had several staff that has attend trainings on employment and services to deaf blind individuals. There was excellent information that was brought back to their team.

Lincoln District Report

This quarter we had an intern start in our district. She is working 10 hours a week. She has been teaching Braille, computer and homemaking. She developed a weekend activity for our kids. We had 7 kids, ages 7-16, participate. We are partnering with Fremont Public Schools. Mary Robinson the vision teacher is participating in the activities. We have named the group STARS; Social, Travel and Recreation Skills. We made wagon wheel casserole and had a spooky scavenger hunt. We have planned another activity for the first weekend in December.

We have started another internship with a recent graduate of Southeast Community College. She will assist us with some computer maintenance duties as well as direct teaching with clients. She is interviewing for other positions and internships outside of the agency.

We had one session of GATE this quarter with 2 participants. We will have the second session at the end of November.

Larry Roos has continued to receive benefits training. Larry Mackey participated in a disability awareness day with Homeland Security. Amy Buresh attended Deaf Blind Training in August. The program was presented by RSA. Larry Roos attended an Employment Conference in Washington DC in September. This workshop was also sponsored by RSA.

We are working with the Department of Roads to set up some internships with their department. We did not have any placements this quarter.

Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Not a complaint but a person who was applying for services called with questions about how services were provided and questions about purchasing equipment and when in the process.

The Employment Committee has started to meet again. Members include: Carlos Serván, Victoria Rasmussen, Sarah Stewart, Larry Roos, Larry Oleson, Nancy Flearl and Chad Weber. This year we will be taking a look at marketing to do outreach to clients and employers through the development of a PSA and possibly a employment Conference for clients some time next year.

NBE (Nebraska Business Enterprise)

Carlos Serván is doing a good job as director of NBE. He has been very busy working on issues for current vendors and putting in a new bid for the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center in Grand Island. Bill Brown, Kathy Stephens, Pearl Van Zandt and the vendor also worked on putting the bid together. We have learned that vending in Lincoln state office buildings will soon be out of our hands. Carlos is following up with State Purchasing about this change. In the meantime, Don Ward, Bill, Carlos and the 2 vendors involved are working on the logistics to move all the equipment out of our current sites. Some may be relocated to replace older machines, some will be surplus and some will be kept in storage.

Business Office

Since last meeting, the biennium budget proposal was submitted to the State Legislature and Governor Heineman. There is no response yet about our request, but we normally do not hear anything until the hearings in February or March. We did hear that our Efficiency Review Plan was considered to be one of the best submitted.

Kathy Stephens

Assisted with Braille Note Apex project. Staff assigned Apex were entered into the EDGE Fixed Asset system and assigned Tag numbers.

Assisted with Proposal for Vending Contractual Services – State Office Bldg Cafeteria and Grand Island

Assisting with mailing out Transition Team booklets

Completed registrations and room reservations for NCBVI staff and clients attending NFB-N Convention in Columbus.

Assisted with NCSAB Fall Conference registrations.

Assisted “Friends of the Commission” with a mailing to Stock Brokers.

Dave Robinson

Robert Newman submitted his resignation/retirement notice, effective December 31, 2010. His position was advertised immediately, with a closing date of September 1, 2010 We received permission from the State Personnel Director to fill Robert’s position earlier than usual, so that his replacement will be afforded the opportunity to be hired, while Robert is still

with the agency and can gain valuable experience from him. Monica Tripp was hired to fill Robert's position and she started September 27, 2010

The two job openings introduced me to the State's new NeoGov hiring system. I was to have formal training on it August 23rd, but we had to get Robert's job posted immediately, so I had to self-instruct. There were some minor errors, but I managed to get the jobs advertised and the new system looks to be a vast improvement, over its predecessor.

I diverted from my usual bill paying/HR duties, to spend an afternoon in the Center on August 23rd, introducing the center students to candle making. It was different and rewarding to work directly with clients, for a change.

Dottie Wilmott and Bob Deaton have been working on eForce. Dottie is finalizing the changes needed to begin tracking our Independent Living services as well as Voc Rehab. The I.L. go live date was delayed, but should be next week, November 9 or 10.

Lunch – A lunch break was taken at 11:55 p.m. The meeting resumed at 12:30 p.m.

Per request, this item was moved up in the agenda.

Communication between Commissioners' & Employees

Director Van Zandt noted that on the NCBVI website there is a document that speaks of the role of the Commissioners. Several years ago the Board adopted this document as the role of the Commissioners.

Van Zandt stated that when it comes to policy issues, she feels it is important that communication from the Board goes through her on issues. Likewise, staff should go through the Executive Director for communication.

Commissioner Hansen stated that the Chain of Command should be followed. The Commission Board communicates to staff through the Executive Director. The information then comes back to the Board through the Executive Director. If an individual is not getting the information they are seeking, they should go to the next level.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she does not want it to be policy that Commissioners can never contact staff as she does not feel this is useful or appropriate. Commissioner Oltman stated that she feels the key word is "policy". If the inquiry relates to NCBVI policy or an NCBVI program then the inquiry should go through the Executive Director and follow the Chain of Command.

Director Van Zandt read the Commissioner Job Description into the record. It is inserted here:

Commissioners shall:

1. Employ an Executive Director who is the administrative officer of NCBVI and who shall serve at the pleasure of the Board.
2. Annually evaluate the Executive Director using a specified performance tool created by the Board and approved by State Personnel under the Department of Administrative Services.
3. Require the Executive Director to submit her/his goals and objectives for NCBVI yearly. (It was noted that this item should be removed as it was the consensus of the Board at the August 2010 Commission Board meeting that this will no longer be required, unless at some point the Board feels otherwise.)
4. Provide guidance to the Executive Director in carrying out the mission of NCBVI.
5. Seek input from both consumers and staff through public meetings, correspondence, surveys, etc.
6. Perform relevant duties formerly assigned to the State Rehabilitation Council.
7. Approve rules, regulations and policies adopted and promulgated by NCBVI.
8. Have a working knowledge of the Rehabilitation Act, rules and regulations, and other materials necessary for the operation of NCBVI.
9. Serve as a liaison between the public and NCBVI.
10. Annually elect a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and an Executive Session Secretary.
11. Attend and participate in NCBVI functions whenever possible, meeting with the entire staff as often as feasible.

12. Receive, read and respond in a timely manner to materials from the Executive Director, NCBVI staff, consumers and fellow Commissioners, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
13. Receive both written and in-person focus reports from NCBVI staff, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
14. Receive and read NCBVI budgetary information and monitor that process, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
15. Answer questions from consumers, NCBVI employees and the general public about NCBVI programs, processes, policies and procedures, seeking input from appropriate staff in order to provide accurate and up-to-date information.
16. Receive, only for purposes of her/his evaluation and guidance, reports from the Executive Director on unresolved personnel matters, including a description of the situation, a synopsis of progress toward resolution, and a summary of any policy changes implemented to address the problem, only when such matters reach a level requiring her/his intervention. The Board will not intervene in personnel issues, recognizing that there is a labor dispute process for State employees in place in the State of Nebraska.
17. Make suggestions and recommendations to NCBVI that will improve its operation and that will lead to better services to its consumers.
18. Communicate as a body only after reaching a consensus and only over the signature of the Chairperson.
19. Communicate as individual Board members using good judgment and discretion, and with a clear indication of a member's speaking for him/herself rather than as a spokesperson for the Board.
20. Develop and update a New Commissioner Kit that will facilitate training of newcomers to the Board.

21. See that new Commissioners become familiar with materials on the NCBVI web site, tour the Nebraska Center for the Blind, read the "starter kit", and review Focus Reports and Board motions involving NCBVI operations.

Commissioner Johnson requested a commitment from the Commissioners to check their email at least every other day because items do come up between the Commission Board meetings.

It was agreed that correspondence from the Commission Board to staff and/or the public should go through the Commission Chairperson. All commissioners should be in agreement with the response that is sent.

Chairperson Johnson stated that when she receives an email from a consumer asking for services she forwards it to the Executive Director and it is her intention to copy the entire Board on this email. Chairperson Johnson stated that these types of emails she feels she can take care of. However, if the email is a general question about agency policy or programs, she feels the Board should have a single spokesperson to respond. It was the consensus that the responses should come from the Chairperson. If a single commissioner receives an email from a consumer the commissioner may respond saying they have forwarded the email to the entire Board for a response. Commission Chairperson stated that she feels it is important to keep all commissioners informed and to remain professional.

Fatos Floyd noted that commission staff has been receiving very nice emails from Commissioner Jirak on their anniversary date. Fatos thanked Commissioner Jirak for sending these emails. It was clarified that these emails are from the entire Board. Chairperson Johnson had requested Commissioner Jirak to send out these emails.

AS/EDGE (Formerly DAS/NIS) Update

There was nothing to report on this topic. It was the consensus of the Board to remove this item as a standard agenda item and only include it on the agenda on an as needed basis.

NFB Newsline Update

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

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®

October 15, 2010

Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to autumn! As the leaves begin to change and fall from the trees the numbers for NFB-Newsline® start to go up. It's the perfect time of year to snuggle down with a cup of hot coco and catch up on the happenings across the country. The first part of this quarter ended out a wonderful summer, so let's take a look at the stats for August and September.

August saw an increase of subscribers by 14 totaling out the month at 1,448. As subscribers basked in the sun they called NFB-Newsline® 1,105 times for a total of 20,080 minutes. The numbers continue to heat up with 12,669 accesses to Nebraska newspapers and 122 accesses to the local channel. A few subscribers came out of the sun to cool off and watch a little TV as that channel was accessed 489 times. Subscribers spent an average of 18.17 minutes on the phone each time they accessed Newsline and out of all calls made 43.01% of those calls were made using the local number.

In September it was time to get things finished up outside before the first frost hit as only 5 new subscribers were added that month. Subscribers accessed Newsline 1,019 times in September with 16,698 minutes of

content read. The average call length was 16.39 minutes, and the percentage of local calls was 38.38%. The channel accesses are as follows: Nebraska papers 3,144, local channel 116 and TV listings 375.

As we begin autumn the numbers definitely aren't falling. Half way through October 6 new subscribers have already been added. Those 1,456 subscribers have read thus far 8,843 minutes with each call lasting approximately 18.73 minutes. 48% of those calls were made using the local number. The Nebraska newspapers were accessed 1,332 times and the local channel was accessed only 41 times so far. TV listings, however, have been accessed 243 times up to this point. Not a bad start to October.

Later this month I will be in charge of a workshop for NFB-Newsline® at the NFB of Nebraska state convention. All aspects of Newsline will be covered at the workshop. In November just after the conclusion of the Board of Commissioners meeting I will be attending the NFB of Nebraska Omaha Chapter White Cane Banquet. Each year I give a short presentation of Newsline at the banquet and receive funds from the Omaha Telephone Pioneers.

Dr. Van Zandt and I have not had a chance to discuss the phone line for NFB-Newsline® as of yet, but we hope to get together soon. I have been in contact with the Talking Book Library in regards to their application process and we will continue to discuss ways of improving Newsline to that subscriber base. Recently I was contacted by Nancy Noha with the Assistive Technology Partnership. She's interested in posting information on NFB-Newsline® on their website to reach their extended client base.

This concludes my report for this quarter. Please keep warm and safe as we move into these cool months. Let me know if you have any question and as always thank you for your time and support.

Don Pohlmann: Don asked how much it costs per year for NCBVI to have Newsline available.

Director Van Zandt noted that this was reported on at the August 2010 Commission Board meeting. Below is what was stated at the August 2010 meeting.

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.

CAP Complaints or Issues

Director Van Zandt reported that there have been no CAP complaints or issues this past quarter.

Update on Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE) Randolph-Sheppard Vending Program

Director Van Zandt reported on the update of the Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE) Randolph-Sheppard Vending Program. NBE is currently under the supervision of Carlos Serván. Carlos consults with the Director as needed.

It has been a very busy year with Randolph-Sheppard. The vending in the state offices in Lincoln is now nonexistent. NBE did go through the bidding process. Carlos has been consulting with the State Purchasing Division to get an understanding of where we stand with vending. NBE currently has a proposal for vending at the cafeteria at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center in Grand Island. NBE has vending at the rest areas along the interstate. This is a challenge because according to the contract that was imposed upon us by the Department of Roads, we need to have all the vending sites or none. However, the Department of Roads can close those rest areas whenever they want to for construction or other reasons. NBE operates the dining facility at the Ashland National Guard and one at the Hastings National Guard.

Director Van Zandt reported that NBE currently has 20 blind vendors. Don Ward does a good job working with all the vendors. He fixes the vending machines, provides vendors with training and works out issues between facility managers and individual vendors. Jan Stokebrand works part-time for NBE as the bookkeeper. Dave Robinson is working on reviewing policy and looking for opportunities for bids. Dave also works with the vendors regarding payment of their obligations. Bill Brown gets involved with a variety of aspects of NBE as they touch the business office.

As for the Proposal that was recently submitted for Grand Island, the vendor had to come up with Proposal for many of the details and Carlos and Bill got the Request for Proposals from the State, Kathy went through the Proposal to make sure all the technical guidelines were being followed and Pearl worked on the wording of many of the sections. This was truly a team effort.

Carlos Serván reported that in trying to clarify the issue at the State Office Building and the snack machines at the State Capitol, NBE's Proposal was rejected several months ago. State Purchasing did not explain why it was rejected. Carlos stated that he tried to get an idea of why it was rejected and they responded not to worry, they will open it up again for bid. It was noted that all the Proposals were rejected at this time so State Purchasing basically did not grant the award at this time. Approximately a year later another Bid for Proposals came out. NBE submitted another bid at this time. After some time, State Purchasing announced they were going to give the bid to First Choice which is a subsidiary of Pepsi. Carlos stated that he began asking why the NBE proposal was rejected. He was not getting any answers so he contacted a supervisor. At this time he was informed that there had not been enough competition. Carlos then asked if there were more bids the second time than the first time. Carlos stated he has not yet received an answer.

In regards to the Bid Proposal for the Law Enforcement Training Center in Grand Island, NCBVI staff is not an expert in running cafeterias. If a vendor wants to run a cafeteria, they need to be able to express how they will do it. Therefore, if a vendor is interested in running a cafeteria, NCBVI will support them, but the vendor must put in writing how they will run their business.

Chairperson Johnson inquired as to if NCBVI has a vendor in mind when we bid for a new site. Van Zandt stated that there has to be a vendor in mind. Van Zandt stated that there is a whole process in how a vendor for a new facility is chosen. There is a Vendor's Committee voted upon by blind vendors. The Randolph-Sheppard law requires that the State Licensing Agency work in partnership with the Vendors Committee. When there is a possible new vending site, sometimes the agency comes up with it and sometimes the vendor comes up with it.

When a new vending site is decided upon, the word goes out to all the existing vendors asking if they are interested in operating the site. If there is more than one vendor interested it goes through an interview process. The Vendors Committee makes a recommendation to the agency Director. The final decision of who gets the site is made by the agency Director.

Chairperson Johnson stated that what she is hearing is that running the NBE Program is a lot of work. Johnson inquired as to if it would be a good idea to have a Vending Supervisor position again. Van Zandt reported that NCBVI use to have a supervisor for the NBE Program until he retired in December 2009. Van Zandt stated that the program had not been run as thoroughly as it is now. Everyone on the team contributes a piece to the NBE Program. Van Zandt noted that she feels that NBE will be able to access more opportunities than we could before and NCBVI is able to save money by not filling that position.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she feels this adds a lot to staff's current job responsibilities. Most of the staff on the NBE team are salaried employees and she has concerns about NCBVI asking staff to work too many extra hours knowing that they are not hourly employees. Van Zandt noted that the hourly staff needs to request overtime which is approved on a rare basis. Van Zandt stated that she has worked with the Deputy Directors to make sure that other programs do not suffer.

Carlos Serván reported that he initially informed Van Zandt that he wanted to get involved in the NBE Program because he saw a disconnect between the field services and the NBE Program. As Deputy Director of field services he did not know much about what went on in the NBE Program. Carlos stated that he saw this as an opportunity to make it a program in which the counselors are involved. Counselors must work to make sure the clients are prepared before they come to the NBE Program.

In the past, the NBE Program had to train the client. The NBE team feels that it is important that the client has all the skills needed before becoming part of the NBE Program.

Carlos noted that supervising the NBE Program does take extra time for him, but he will no longer be running the WAGES program in the summer. A part-time person will be hired to run WAGES in the summer. Carlos stated that he understands that staff is expected to do extra work when it is needed. Carlos noted that most of the operations in the NBE Program are snack machines. Carlos stated that it is hoped to get more vending facilities in the future.

Chairperson Johnson stated that her concern is that there is a limited number of hours in each day and she is concerned that we may be asking staff to take on too many duties. She does not want other Programs to suffer and she does not want to push people to work an 80 hour week and get burned out.

Director Van Zandt stated that she communicates with staff every day to try to keep a balance and make sure our staff does not get burned out. Van Zandt reported that NCBVI is requesting in-grade adjustments for the salaries for Carlos Serván, Bob Deaton and Dave Robinson. For Don Ward, they are looking at a reclassification because his job is better described as "Program Specialist for NBE".

Carlos Serván noted that he enjoys the work he does and he is glad to have the support of the Executive Director. He finds this to be very invigorating.

Update on Certificate Design for Service Provider Awards

Commissioner Mike Hansen gave an update on the Service Provider Awards. 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.

Commissioner Hansen proposed the following for the awards:

Award 1:

The first award would be a Proclamation in the form of a certificate declaring the group or individual an “Ally in Blindness Independence.” The criteria will be the performance of service to the Commission.

Commissioner Hansen suggested the following text for the Proclamation. “For exemplary service shown in the support of the efforts of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Blind Nebraskans everywhere the Nebraska Commission for the Blind Board of Commissioners hereby proclaims “name” an Ally in Blindness Independence.”

The layout of the certificate would have “Ally in Blindness Independence” across the top, followed by the groups/individuals name below and the date. Below this will be the text of the proclamation and the signatures of all five commissioners.

Award 2:

The second award would be in the form of a plaque and would be called “Commissioners’ Advocacy in Blindness Award.” The criteria will be the performance of extraordinary service to the Commission. This award would be held back (coveted a bit more) and only given out to those individuals who make major contributions (financial or otherwise) to the Commission.

The plaque would be in the shape of the State of Nebraska with the NCBVI logo in the Panhandle.

Awards will be given out as appropriate submissions for the awards are received. Chairperson Johnson will send an email to Director Van Zandt regarding nominating individuals or organizations for the awards. Director Van Zandt will then forward the email to all NCBVI staff.

Budget Update

Chairperson Johnson reported that recently NCBVI had a request from the Auditors about the Director’s time record.

Director Van Zandt reported that when NCBVI first became a Commission every time she wanted to take any time off (sick or vacation leave) she would send an email to the Board and ask permission to have the time off. The Board decided that they did not need to approve the Director’s leave in advance as she is a CEO.

Each pay period all staff fill out a timesheet indicating how many hours each day they worked or took for vacation or sick leave. The Director sends her timesheet to the Board as a record of her time, but the Board is not officially approving the timesheet. All other staff in the agency has their timesheet approved by their supervisor. Van Zandt noted that this is all done electronically. This serves as a trail that the employee submitted their time record and the supervisor approved the record. When the Auditor was reviewing some items at NCBVI, they saw that there was no approval for the Director's timesheets and they questioned this. Van Zandt proposed that the Board could annually pass a motion to approve the timesheets as regularly submitted by the Executive Director.

Commissioner Oltman moved that the Board do a motion to approve the timesheet as submitted by the Executive Director at the May Commission meeting each year in conjunction with the Evaluation of the Executive Director. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all Board members were unanimously in favor of the motion.

Director Van Zandt reported that the agency is managing fine at the current time in regards to the budget. All staff are doing a good job in being conscientious about expenses and not going overboard with things, but yet providing the services and resources that clients need.

The budget for the next Biennium is the big question. The next Biennium begins July 1, 2011. The NCBVI's Proposal, along with all other agencies, will be decided upon by the Unicameral and the Governor when the Session begins after the first of the year. It will be a long legislative session this next year. Van Zandt noted that we will not know what the budget will be until a later date.

Van Zandt noted that the Budget request already computes in some staffing changes. The positions of NBE Director, part-time VR Tech and North Platte District supervisor have become vacant. An Omaha VR Counselor will also be retiring at the end of the year. All of this has created some savings. Van Zandt reported that the NCBVI is proposing creating a Program Manager for Information Technology position. If this position is granted, NCBVI will still save \$21,600 each year. The funding for this position is already in the agency's Status Quo Proposal, but it must be approved by State Personnel, the Governor's Office and the Budget Office. Van Zandt reported that an actual job description for this position is not yet written. Van Zandt noted that technology is a huge need for clients and the agency.

Van Zandt noted that if the NCBVI budget is cut, we should not have to lay off any employees at this time. NCBVI is working hard to ensure that staff will not be laid off at this time. However, it cannot be promised that NCBVI will not have to lay off staff, especially if the budget is severely cut.

Public Comment

Howard Compton: Howard asked how many employees NCBVI has and how many of those employees are blind.

Van Zandt reported that the agency has 49 employees (full time and part time) and 17 of these employees are blind.

Howard Compton asked if this is considered integrated employment. Van Zandt stated that this is integrated.

Commissioner Hansen noted that NCBVI has no obligation to have a certain number of blind employees so this is a different situation than they have at ONI. Commissioner Hansen added that he does feel that it is very important for NCBVI to employ qualified blind people.

Howard Compton stated that this goes back to what he has always believed; Government enacts laws but they do not have to abide by them.

Commissioner Hansen noted that there are certain benefits that an organization such as Outlook Nebraska gains by working under the rules that they do. ONI receives other government benefits and government contracts based on the number of blind employees they have.

Mark Bulger: Mark thanked the Commission Board for their services. Mark inquired about the comment that was made in regard to many of the NCBVI staff having a lot of windshield time when traveling throughout the state. Mark asked how NCBVI blind employees travel throughout the state. Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI contracts with individuals to serve as drivers. Mark asked who pays for this service. Van Zandt noted that this is part of NCBVI operations. Mark asked if for this reason it costs more to hire a blind person who needs a driver. Van Zandt noted that providing a driver is a reasonable accommodation for a person who is blind. Van Zandt stated that blind staff often works on reports and notes while driving and a sighted person is unable to do this. Therefore, this does offer a balance. It was noted that a driver does not assist blind staff in getting to the job. All staff members have the responsibility of getting themselves to and from work each day.

Discussion of Staff Restructuring

This item was discussed earlier in the meeting.

Set 2011 Meetings & Focus Topics

Director Van Zandt noted that the 2011 State Staff meeting is scheduled for April 5, 6 and 7.

The following dates and Focus Topic for 2011 were decided upon for the Commission Board Meetings.

February 5, 2011, Omaha	State Plan
May 14, 2011, Norfolk Evaluation	Executive Director
August 6, 2011, York	Partnerships of NCBVI
November (Date TBA), Lincoln Position	Apartment Resource

Adjourn – The November 6, 2010 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Julie Johnson

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

1. Technology services description.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The Commission's Technology Program is not only the heart of adaptive technology but also for regular computer training for blind consumers in Nebraska. Computer access equipment enables individuals who are blind or visually impaired to acquire skills necessary to compete effectively in vocational training and employment. This program employs three full-time technology specialists, located in Omaha, Lincoln and North Platte districts. They provide assessments, training and consultation to blind consumers, employers across the state, and staff members. Furthermore, technology services are provided to consumers via statewide workshops, telephone, and e-mail.

For instance, last year, consultations were also provided to Apogee call center, the Social Security Administration, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Saint Francis Hospital in Grand Island, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Nebraska Library Commission, Bryan-LGH West, Saint Elizabeth Hospital, Hillis 66, West Corporation, Qwest Customer Service Center, Lancaster County, Lincoln Workforce Development, Mexican American Commission, Medigraphix, Calvary Methodist Church, University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Chadron State College, Southeast Community College, Metro Community College, Hamilton College, Doane College, Iowa Western Community College, Influent, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Office of the CIO, US Info, ConAgra Food, the Hyatt Hotel reservation center in Omaha, GoodWill Industries of Omaha and Grand Island, Red Cross, Cabela's, Frank House in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Labor, Lincoln Public Schools, Omaha public schools, Minden High School, North Platte

Public Schools, Alliance Public Schools, Region 1 Office of Human Development in Sidney, Grand Island public schools, Scottsbluff High School, and JRW Sales Inc., among others. The technology program also provides loaner equipment to consumers and employers.

Our technology specialists utilize adaptive software for consumers' on-the-job settings. Most of the time, only small changes are required to make the blind person's job feasible and more competitive. However, in some instances it takes a lot of effort, research, and resources to solve a problem. When technology specialists meet with clients who may be in a job-jeopardy situation, job duties are analyzed and intensive on-the-job training is provided to keep that person's employment. If a person is working toward employment, the technology specialist evaluates what skills will be necessary for the educational and employment activities to reach employment. Keyboarding and Braille assessments are given, depending on the type of technology needed. On occasion, NCBVI contracts with third parties to provide some scripting and also to teach adaptive equipment,

In an effort to prepare high school students for college, technology specialists oftentimes work with clients on accessing textbook materials from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, BookShare and the National Library Service. Public school systems too often do this for the student instead of teaching them to do it for themselves. Teaching younger students to get excited about technology can also mean teaching them to do things their sighted peers are doing, such as texting (you can e-mail text messages to cell phones and receive replies), accessing web pages of favorite celebrities, and instant messaging.

The focus continues to be on demonstrating the use of note-takers, speech systems for Windows 2000, XP, Vista, and now exploring Windows 7.

Windows-based applications with speech and magnification are taught. Voice recognition systems are also valuable for consumers who cannot physically use a keyboard.

The Commission's technology specialists are continuously researching in order to keep up with changes in technology and to have it available to consumers and employers. The Tech Team, (three tech specialists, the deputy directors, and the business manager) meet at least quarterly in person to address issues regarding all technology that might affect our clients and staff members. Issues are also discussed with the District Supervisors and we come up with solutions and, in some cases, new policies.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES TO NCBVI STAFF

As well as our work with clients and employers across the state of Nebraska, 3 Program Specialists for Technology Services also provide services to agency staff. All support for adaptive technology including magnification and speech software, Braille output devices and software, note takers and optical character recognition systems are maintained by the technology specialists. Upgrades to such software are typically implemented by the technology services staff because administrative rights are required on the computers to perform such upgrades.

Technology staff also maintains an inventory of computers and peripherals in each office. Often the installation of mainstream software and hardware is performed in-house. The help desk is called if such projects require expertise or time beyond what our program specialists can offer.

Training is provided by technology staff and orientation counselors for staff needing a refresher on the use of adaptive technology.

Staff members also receive training on new hardware and software that becomes available. If training is affordable and available, technology services staff will coordinate with vendors to provide intensive training on adaptive technologies.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES for WORK AND GAIN EXPERIENCE IN THE SUMMER (WAGES)

Technology services have always played a vital role in the WAGES program. Computers have been equipped with JAWS and Zoomtext for use by transition age students who have worked at several job sites including the Mexican American Commission, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the Ombudsman's office, Lincoln Senior Partners program, the One-Stop center, Food Bank, and the Assistive Technology Partnership. WAGES participants have also used note takers and closed circuit televisions at many worksites.

In our ongoing effort to provide mentoring by blind adults during the program, the computer used by dormitory staff is also equipped with JAWS. Zoomtext is available if there is a staff member who uses it.

Orientation counselors and technology staff have also worked with several clients on technology during their WAGES experience. We have provided training with Braille note taking devices, computers and Braille displays to clients during their off hours. Technology staff is responsible for installing assistive technology as well as removing the technology from WAGES worksite computers. Technology staff work very close with the employers on checking their software systems and protecting their confidential information. If questions or problems arise during the program, staff is available to help the employer resolve them.

2. Technology guidelines.

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Technology Services Guidelines

Definition of Technology: For the purposes of these guidelines, technology is defined as computer hardware, software and peripheral devices, both mainstream and adaptive.

Services to Individuals with Active VR Cases

Inclusion of Technology in the Client's Plan

When a client and counselor are considering including technology in the IPE, a technology specialist shall be involved in the assessment of the specific technology needs. The technology specialist will assist the client and counselor by making recommendations on appropriate equipment after the initial assessment of the client's needs.

When technology training is needed, training goals will be outlined by the client and counselor, with input from the technology specialist, based on the individual's current skills and the expected outcomes. The training goals developed by client and counselor will be incorporated into the IPE, detailing the resources that will be used (staff time, third party provider, software, hardware, tutorials, classes, etc.). Progress evaluations will be made by the client, counselor and technology specialist to ensure that the training goals are being achieved. Any necessary adjustments to the technology services will be made in the IPE.

Services to Individuals with Active IL Cases

Technology will not be purchased for IL consumers if more than one or two instructional sessions with a Technology Specialist or other staff member is indicated. Exceptions will be considered depending on the consumer's need for technology. If denial of technology and requisite support will make the difference in that person's ability to maintain independence and quality of life, and if no other resources are available, the Commission will provide that service.

Technology for IL consumers may also be purchased if training can be arranged with third party providers rather than Commission staff. This may involve identifying and developing local providers where such support is not now available.

Requests for the Purchase of Technology

When an active client requests financial support from the Commission for the purchase of technology, the following steps should be followed:

The request will be made in writing or other appropriate format by the client and reviewed by the counselor and the district technology specialist. The submitted request should demonstrate that the client has an understanding of why this technology is an appropriate tool to achieve their vocational goal, and should include the anticipated cost of the technology.

Exceptions may be made in cases where obtaining or retaining a job requires immediate purchase of technology and/or services. The technology specialist will be consulted to ensure compatibility with software and existing technology.

If the request is being made by the counselor, the counselor will discuss the technology needs with the district technology specialist to help ensure that all appropriate alternatives and available technologies are considered prior to fulfilling a request. In cases where the counselor is making the request, the written request from the client may be omitted, but is still encouraged.

A hands-on assessment with the requested technology should take place prior to its purchase. This will help to ensure that the client has appropriate expectations of the technology. In the case where a request is made by a counselor, the counselor, along with the client, should be involved in the hands-on assessment when possible. When the specific technology in question is not available for a hands-on evaluation, reasonable attempts to gain access to the technology for the purpose of evaluation will be made. A reasonable attempt may involve borrowing technology from the AT4All website, a vendor, arranging a demonstration at a vendor's site, demonstration software, or evaluating a similar piece of technology. This evaluation should take place prior to the written request.

The request will be reviewed by the district technology specialist and counselor. The technology specialist will discuss the request with the client and/or counselor if more information is needed prior to making a recommendation. It is not the technology specialist's role to approve or deny requests; rather to review them and make appropriate recommendations. The purpose of this step is to help ensure that all appropriate alternatives and available technologies are considered prior to fulfilling a request.

Clients will be informed of the responsibilities that come with ownership of technology including the costs associated with upgrades and repairs before purchases are made.

When technology is issued to a client, they will be given a supplement to the acceptance agreement which will include detailed explanations of the responsibilities specific to the technology they are being issued.

A decision on approval or denial of the request will be made by the counselor and if appropriate the counselor's supervisor after considering the client's requests and the recommendations of the technology specialist.

The original request along with any documentation of the technology specialist's recommendation should be included in the client's file.

Requests for Technology Service

When a technology specialist is contacted with requests for service or maintenance of a clients existing technology, support will be limited to short telephone or email support. If the issues can not be resolved in a brief period of time either via email or telephone or it is determined that the issue does not relate to adaptive technology, the technology specialists will refer the client to technical support for their product or other local resources. If other resources have been exhausted or are unavailable, the technology specialist, in conjunction with the client and counselor, will determine whether or not Commission resources can be used to resolve the issues and if so, which resources. On-site visits by technology specialists for the purpose of installing upgrades or maintaining equipment for any client will only be done when it is determined to be necessary that the Commission provide that service in order for the client to reach their independent living or employment goals.

Services to Individuals without Active Cases:

Request for technology support from individuals without active cases will be limited to short telephone or email support. If the issue can not be resolved in a brief period of time or if it is a recurrent issue, the technology specialists will refer the individual to the vendor of the product or other local resources.

Technology specialists cannot provide on-site visits/support for individuals who do not have an active case unless it is for the purpose of gathering information to be used by a counselor to determine the need for opening a case.

If support from a technology specialist beyond that outlined in these guidelines is necessary, a determination of appropriate Commission services will be made.

If the support needed is related to an employment situation, the Services to Employers guidelines will be used.

SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

Evaluate and assess client's technology needs and ability to perform essential job duties.

Technology specialist and/or consultant will evaluate potential employer's computer system for accessibility and compatibility with adaptive technology.

When counselor, supervisor and employer deem it necessary, equipment recommended by technology specialist will be purchased for the job site.

Install and customize necessary adaptive technology to perform essential job duties.

Technology specialist will make a recommendation with NCBVI supervisor as to providing direct service or contracting for service.

The employer will provide a computer administrator account for technology specialist/consultant for purposes of customization, or have an administrator available at all times, when technology specialist/consultant is on-site, if applicable.

When a consultant is needed for a job site, the technology specialist, district supervisor and employer will determine who will pay for consultant fees.

Provide training to client and employer's designee on use of adaptive technology. Written documentation, in accessible format, will be provided to client and employer.

After employment begins and technology is in place, the technology specialist will continue to maintain contact with employer, client and counselor until placement is considered successful by all.

Routine computer maintenance is to be completed by employer's designated technology staff. If employer's technician is unsure about an adaptive technology issue, the employer should first contact the NCBVI technology specialist.

3. Technology at the Nebraska Center for the Blind.

At the Nebraska Center for the Blind, we focus on teaching adaptive technology using speech access and Braille. Software we use include:

Operating Systems: Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and the Mac.

Speech access: JAWS, Window-Eyes, SA To Go, and Guide.

Scanning Software: Eyepal, Openbook, and Kurzweil

Computer Applications: Talking Typing Teacher, Internet, email, Skype, Dragon Dictate, and Microsoft Office programs, such as Word and excel.

We teach clients programs that will help them to succeed on the job and in their day-to-day life. We help them with Internet banking, social networking sites such as Facebook, and we help them to search for jobs online.

We train clients on a variety of equipment, including desktops, laptops, and netbooks.

Adaptive equipment we use for Braille include BrailleNote, VoiceNote, Pacmate, Braille Sense, Voice Sense, Braille Displays, and Embossers.

For digital books, we teach the Victor Stream and Book Sense.

4. Policy on digital books

MEMORANDUM

To: All NCBVI staff

From: Carlos Serván, Deputy Director for VR services

CC: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director.

Date: August 19, 2010

Re: Digital book readers

Digital book readers, such as the Victor Reader Stream and the BookSense, have several models and/or add ons. Unless there is a justifiable additional disability or specific non traditional vocational need, The Commission will purchase only the base model of the book reader. If a client wishes to have an add-on or more expensive model, he or she should pay for the additional cost.

5. Policy on note-takers

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 4, 2010

To: All NCBVI staff

From: Carlos Serván, Deputy Director- VR services

CC: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director, IL services

Re: GUIDELINES FOR BLIND NOTETAKER PURCHASES

If a client is not going to request a Braille display, a different device – such as a laptop – with assistive software will be purchased.

The district Technology Specialist must be contacted by the VR Counselor and/or client to discuss the use of a blind Notetaker.

A blind note taking device will be purchased for the purpose of achieving the vocational goal stated in the IPE. If the client is no longer working toward a goal that requires note taking technology, the equipment must be returned to NCBVI.

A client must meet the following inputting and reading speeds in order to get a blind Notetaker:

The client must be able to input at a rate of no less than 40 words per minute. If requesting a Qwerty Notetaker, a qwerty keyboarding test will be conducted. If requesting a Perkins Notetaker, a Perkins keyboarding test will be conducted.

The client must be able to read Braille at a rate of 50 words per minute. The client may choose to read from a refreshable Braille display or a traditional Braille text.

The client must be able to articulate why a blind Notetaker should be purchased instead of another comparable device.

6. Equipment tracking policy

MEMORANDUM

From: Carlos Serván

To: All NCBVI Staff

CC: Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director

Date: January 8, 2009

Re: Equipment Tracking Policy

This policy will address the procedures for some equipment and adaptive devices that NCBVI employees have in their possession, and also the equipment that staff members get in repossession from clients.

1. Equipment and adaptive devices that NCBVI employees possess.

This purpose of this procedure is to help all staff members to know what is available in each office and what resources we could use for demonstration for clients and the public. It is also good policy and practice to have a database of all items to be accountable to auditors.

a- All staff members will send a complete list of all adaptive items and technology assets, except PCs or laptops, in their possession to their district supervisor. The following are some of the items which should be included in the list submitted to the supervisors:

Note-takers, Braille Writers, digital readers/recording, KNFB readers or other portable readers, cell phones, talking calculators, talking glucometer, talking scale, tactile games, digital games, digital camera, digital video camera, projectors, panel for presentations, thumb-drives, voice activated remote control, color identifier, etc.

b- District supervisors will enter the list of equipment into an Excel document. Supervisors will maintain the document, as well.

c- This list of equipment will be available in the W drive and readable by all NCBVI employees but only Supervisors will be able to make changes.

2. Client equipment which is repossessed by NCBVI staff:

a- Any staff member from the district (Voc tech, counselors, technology specialist or supervisors), who takes possession of a piece of equipment returned from a client, must report it to the technology specialist in their respective district.

b- The technology staff in each district will keep track of this equipment in an Excel document.

c- This list in an Excel document will be available in the W drive and readable only, by everyone

d- Staff members should be able to read this Excel list when looking for any equipment for their clients.

e- This equipment can be reassigned to a new client only after the technology specialist from the district documents it and it is reflected in the Excel document.

7. Return of use equipment policy

MEMORANDUM

To: All NCBVI staff

From: Carlos Serván, Deputy Director for VR services

CC: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director.

Date: August 11, 2005

Re: Return of used equipment

In many cases the agency gets used equipment back from clients for a variety of reasons. The idea is to get the equipment back to NCBVI so it can be used by other clients. However, in some instances the equipment is too old to be re-used and it can cost more to the agency to try to fix it or upgrade it, or it is just not useable at all. Therefore, in order to prevent the agency from incurring the cost of disposal of obsolete equipment, Technology Specialists need to be informed and consulted about client equipment being offered for return BEFORE it is accepted by the agency. It is also important to remember that there is no longer a storage space available in which this equipment can be housed.

A database list of used equipment that Technology Specialists consider to be functional will be maintained so that Technology Specialists can distribute it appropriately to other clients across the state.

8. Assistive Technology Partnership participation 9. PILBO grant proposal.

Assistive technology partnership participation

The Commission participates as a member of the Assistive Technology Partnership. The partnership helps people with funding for technology when other sources are not available and operates the Assistive Technology for All website. The partnership also works with Medicaid waivers for medically necessary technology and home modifications to allow individuals with disabilities to remain independent in their homes.

Nancy Coffman, one of the Program Specialists for Technology Services, is on the ATP advisory council. All 3 of the technology specialists serve as program managers on the AT4ALL.com website. The at4all site allows Nebraskans to buy, sell, borrow, loan or offer demonstrations of assistive devices. A wide variety of technology is available including computers and computer peripherals, software, magnification equipment and talking products. Our agency received a grant at the beginning of the program for \$60,000 to begin a loan program which is housed on that site. Anyone in Nebraska can set up an account and view most of the entries on the site. Some technology is only available to clients of a particular program such as NCBVI Lincoln, NCBVI Omaha or NCBVI Kearney. The technology team is involved in the management of these programs. High tech items are often loaned to people who are deciding if such a device will be useful to them. These have also been borrowed by people who are sending their technology in for repair.

Items available for demonstration and loan include

BrailleNote Apex with 18-cell displays

Ethernet adapters for PacMates & VoiceNotes

Victor Reader Wave players for Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic CD books

Wireless Ethernet cards on Compact Flash cards for note-taking devices

Braille directional compasses

Talking compasses

Liquid level indicators

Franklin Language Master pocket dictionary

Mystro PDA with Tracker GPS software

Magnifying glasses and monoculars for demonstration

MAGIC Screen magnification with speech

OpenBook version 8

Plectalk PTR2 DAISY CD reader

PacMate QT with 40-cell display

Prodigy blood glucose monitors

Talking calculators

Talking meat thermometer

Talking digital personal thermometer

Talking blood pressure monitors

Victor Reader Stream daisy readers for downloaded materials

ScreenBraille communicator

Accu-Chek Voice Mate Blood Glucose Meter

MAX digital magnifier

PacMate with Braille keyboard

QuickLook portable full-color video magnifier

Talking Typer software from APH

Talking Typing Teacher from Marvelsoft

Voice activated phone dialer

BrailleSense with 322-cell display and Braille keyboard

BrailleSense with QWERTY keyboard

Cannoscan scanner for use with computer

ColorTest digital color identifier

Duxbury version 10.7

Electric Perkins Braille

ID Mate bar code reader

JAWS with dongle

Jot-A-Dot Braille

KNFB Mobile reader

Kurzweil 1000

KNFB reader with camera and PDA

Left-handed keyboard

Little fingers keyboard

Pen Friend voice labeling system

Quickbooks 2006

Tabletop APH Cassette 4-track tape recorder

Talking bathroom scale

Talking color identifier

Note-teller money identifier

Talking kitchen scale

Talking scientific calculator

VIP Talking Thermostat

Voxcom identifier system

WindowEyes

Wireless GPS receiver

Compact lamp

Ibill Talking Money Identifier

9. PILBO Grant Proposal

Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha (PILBO)

Program Narrative

1. FUNDING REQUEST:

Brief Description of the Organization:

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is a state agency. It has been providing quality rehabilitation services to blind and visually impaired Nebraskans since 1943. Our mission is: "Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities, and building belief in the blind."

Amount Requested: \$10,000

Need for the Proposed Program:

An estimated 7,000 blind and visually impaired consumers live in Douglas or Sarpy Counties. This number is expected to increase dramatically as more Baby Boomers reaching retirement face the prospect of age related blindness. For many people, vision loss is equated with social isolation and loss of independence. Training in the alternative skills of blindness using assistive technology for the blind can restore confidence and sense of independence. This equipment ranges from the simple (i.e., white cane, slate and stylus for writing Braille, hand held magnifiers) to the sophisticated (i.e., computer access equipment, electronic notetakers, closed circuit television units for reading print).

Ninety-three percent of the Commission's budget is dedicated to serving blind and visually impaired consumers with vocational goals; only seven percent is dedicated to serving consumers with independent living goals. Funding for assistive technology and devices is simply inadequate to meet the need of blind and visually impaired Nebraskans pursuing independent living rather than vocational goals, most of whom are over the age of 55. Medicare and Medicaid do not pay for assistive technology and devices for the blind, and many consumers lack the resources necessary to pay for it

on their own. Consequently, many consumers do not have the equipment they need to achieve the level of independence they would like. Also, many deaf people are unable to afford the high cost of sign language interpreters necessary to participate fully in their home communities. PILBO will help close the gap.

How the Project Relates to the Funders Stated Priorities:

Priority 1: To assist individuals who are unable to care for themselves due to physical disabilities: Commission staff will provide training in the alternative skills of blindness and assistive technology and devices making it possible for blind and visually impaired consumers to achieve or regain independence lost because of blindness. For many, this program will mean the difference between independence and dependence on others, living at home or living in an institution.

Priority 2: To support and provide respite to family members and friends who care for those experiencing a disability: Consumers maintaining their independence using the alternative skills of blindness and assistive technology will be less dependent on family members or friends. This will result in more time for quality interaction with family members as well as more active involvement with friends and the community--for the disabled person as well as family members. Interpreter support will make it possible for deaf-blind consumers to participate in group activities at least once every two months, providing respite to family members as well as opportunities for social interaction. It means that consumers receiving these services will be less dependent on services provided by human service agencies and thereby reduce the tax burden on the state. Family members or other care providers will also have more time to engage in gainful employment thereby returning more tax dollars to the state.

Target Population to be Served:

Those served by this project will reside in Douglas or Sarpy Counties, have a visual impairment that significantly limits their ability to engage in the activities of daily life, have independent living rather than vocational goals, and are 21 years of age or older. Persons qualifying for participation in PILBO are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, national origin, or disability. Persons with low and moderate incomes are especially vulnerable to loss of independence; providing assistive devices will help them to avoid such loss.

Impact the Project will have on the Need for Services:

Consumers served by PILBO will be more able to engage in the activities of daily life and participate more fully as a member of the Omaha metropolitan community with confidence using assistive technology and devices and the alternative skills of blindness. Dependence on families for support will be greatly relieved or eliminated. For older individuals, this program may mean the difference between living in their own homes or placement in nursing homes.

The Commission is responsible for providing rehabilitation services to an estimated 22,000 blind and visually impaired consumers statewide. PILBO will make it possible for an increased number of blind persons living in Douglas and Sarpy Counties to get the training and tools they need to live independently. This project will also free up funds that can benefit consumers living in other parts of the state.

Strategies for Implementing the Project:

Commission services are provided to help blind and visually impaired consumers reach individualized vocational and/or independent living goals specified in service plans jointly developed by the consumer and his or her counselor.

A Technology Specialist is available to assess the consumer's need for and ability to use assistive technology. Training in the use of assistive technology is provided by qualified contractors and staff when indicated. Orientation Counselors provide training in the alternative skills of blindness (i.e., use of the white cane, Braille, and other non-visual or low vision strategies for engaging in the activities of daily living).

Many community institutions and organizations refer blind and visually impaired consumers to the Commission for services including eye care professionals, academic institutions, health and human services, consumer organizations, and the business community. Most referrals of consumers with independent living goals in Omaha are generated by the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging (ENOA). Commission staff members frequently give presentations to the public with the objective of increasing awareness of services available to blind and visually impaired consumers. Direct services are provided to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment, vocational training, or full participation in community institutions and organizations.

Other Agencies Offering Similar Services:

The Commission is the only agency providing direct rehabilitation training services to blind and visually impaired consumers, but we work closely with many other agencies:

Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP): ATP is the state program charged with providing information about assistive technology for people with disabilities and resources for acquiring technology. The Commission participates in a web based inventory lending program coordinated by ATP.

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR): VR is the state agency charged with the delivery of vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to consumers with disabilities other than blindness. Commission counselors recognize their expertise and often

consult with VR counselors regarding best approaches to serving blind and visually impaired consumers with secondary disabilities.

Low Vision Clinic, University of Nebraska Medical Center: Consumers with some functional vision will be referred to the Clinic for low vision evaluations to determine how aids and devices can help them best use their remaining vision. The Commission provides low vision aids and devices subsequent to such evaluations.

2. FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

Program Budget:

The budget for this project is \$18,400. Funds from the Enrichment Foundation in the amount of \$10,000 will be used specifically to purchase assistive technology promoting independent living for the target population. The Commission's contribution of \$8,400 covers staff time committed to providing direct services to blind and visually impaired consumers including training in the use of assistive technology and instruction in the alternative skills of blindness.

Sustainability of the Project:

The Commission is working with consumer organizations in an effort to increase state funding to better serve blind and visually impaired Nebraskans. Two years ago, the state legislature awarded the Commission \$75,000 to expand the scope of independent living services to older blind consumers statewide as a result of an initiative by the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) in support of NCBVI. This year, a similar NFBN initiative resulted in \$55,000 increase in state funding making it possible to add another staff person in the Omaha office to work exclusively with older blind consumers.

Every effort will be made to secure additional funds for independent living services through grants from other sources. The Commission will continue to purchase equipment for the target population so long as funds are available.

EVALUATION:

Project Objectives:

Assistive technology and devices and training in how to use the equipment, will be provided to 60 blind and visually impaired adults residing in Douglas and Sarpy Counties for the purpose of promoting greater independence in the home before December 1, 2010

Measures for Determining Success:

Consumers will be expected to make practical application of the equipment provided to them to engage independently in the activities of daily life. Progress consumers make in training and the extent to which equipment is used in the way it was intended will be monitored in individual case records. Each consumer will review his or her service plan with his or her counselor at least once a year to determine if satisfactory progress toward planned objectives is being made or if changes are indicated. Consumer satisfaction surveys will be administered following case closure to assess program effectiveness and need for modifications.