

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Public Meeting of the Board of Commissioners

Holiday Inn; 4619 South Lincoln Avenue, York, NE

August 6, 2011

Approved Minutes

Call to order

Welcome and Introductions, announcements concerning public comments, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings and lunch arrangements

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Dan Bird recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website. A buffet lunch will be provided at noon.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Act was available in both print and Braille format. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website and NFB Newsline®.

Chairperson Johnson read the Public Comment Protocol which went into effect on May 14, 2011. The Protocol is available at the meetings in both braille and print. The Protocol is stated below:

Public Comment Period Protocol

1. There will be no public comments outside of public comment time. If a Commissioner or the Executive Director has a question about the current topic and someone in attendance can answer it, that person may be called on for information. However the person may only speak to the question at hand and must be called on, by the Board Chair, to speak.
2. Names will be taken at the beginning of the public comment time. Those individuals will get a turn to speak in the order the names were received. At the end of that series of speakers, names will again be asked of those wishing to speak. This process will continue until the public comment time has elapsed.
3. Persons who raise their hand to speak will not be recognized. Names should be given verbally.
4. Only the recognized person may speak. The speaker will address the commissioners from the podium or table designated for this purpose.
5. If the Executive Director or Commissioners have questions for the recognized speaker, discussion may proceed with only that speaker. No one else from the public may make comments at this time.

6. If individuals from the public attending the meeting insist on speaking during a time when they are not recognized after being warned, they will be asked to leave. Likewise if there is any other behavior the Chairperson deems inappropriate, i.e. excessive shouting, threats, obscenities etc. that person will be asked to leave.

Reading of the agenda

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made.

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

NCBVI Staff Present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Carlos Servàn, Deputy Director VR; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director IL; Fatos Floyd, Center Director; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant; Cristal Grado, VR Counselor, Kearney

ACB: Mark Bulger, Howard Compton, Shirley Allen, Paulette Monthei

NFB: Amy Buresh, Shane Buresh, Jeff Altman, Cheryl Livingston

York VIPS: Ardean Kohtz

Public Present: Dan Bird, NCBVI Driver and meeting recorder

Approve May 2011 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Walla moved to approve the Minutes of the May 14, 2011 Commission Board Meeting. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all were in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Partnerships with other Agencies

The Focus Topic report was prepared by Bob Deaton, with information gathered from all Supervisors and Teams. The entire report is attached at the end of the minutes. Bob Deaton discussed the highlights of his report. Bob Deaton noted that the report is a broad list of the partnerships and collaborations that NCBVI has. Bob Deaton noted that the list is not comprehensive as many community resources are not reflected in the report. Bob Deaton stated his goal was to describe the major types of interactions and ones that involve staff time.

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) collaborates and interacts with other agencies and organizations on many different levels. These levels of involvement are categorized as follows:

Grants and Financial Supports

Participation on Councils, Boards, Advisory Committees, and Special Meetings/Conference Calls

Collaboration with Other Public Service Agencies

Collaboration with Professional and Non-Profit Organizations

Collaboration with Consumer Organizations

Public Relations

Information and Referral

Bob Deaton gave a brief description of what was outlined in the text and asked if anyone had questions.

Commissioner Hansen stated that he felt the report was very encouraging and it says a lot about how well respected NCBVI staff are nationwide.

Commissioner Oltman inquired about Project SEARCH. Van Zandt reported that Project SEARCH helps students with disabilities learn vocational and competitive skills to help them enter the workplace and to become more independent in the work environment. It is a statewide effort and there are six Project SEARCH locations at the present time. Project SEARCH developed as an inspiration at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Project SEARCH is currently operating at the following locations:

St. Francis Medical Center in Grand Island

Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney

Faith Regional Medical Center in Norfolk

Walmart Distribution Center in North Platte

St. Elizabeth Regional Medical Center in Lincoln

Mary Lanning Medical Services in Hastings

In each of these communities, Project SEARCH has grown through a partnership with Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, local community businesses, local schools, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Assistive Technology Partnership and Developmentally Disabled Services.

Project SEARCH students attend classes at local businesses and work in internship positions Monday through Friday. Students with the assistance of a job coach focus on job skills such as working with co-workers, the importance of being on time and proper workplace grooming. The nutrition, environmental, maintenance and short-stay surgery areas of a hospital provide students an opportunity to learn specific job skills.

NCBVI's role in Project SEARCH is the rehab counselor of the Commission has been on the planning team. NCBVI has also paid for some of the training for hospital or school staff to attend training.

For further information here is a link to Project SEARCH Success Story/Overview Video.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3agnDarnmN4>

Commissioner Hansen inquired about Panhandle Independent Living Services (PILS). Commissioner Hansen read the section on PILS in order that the public would be aware of what was being discussed.

PILS is a community-based, non-profit private center for independent living located in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. PILS offers services in the four core areas of information and referral, advocacy, peer counseling, and independent living skills training promoting greater independence for people with disabilities living in the panhandle of Nebraska.

PILS annually receives Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B funds in the amount of \$85,000 from VR Services and \$15,500 from NCBVI in accordance with the State Plan for Independent Living jointly developed and signed by VR Services, NCBVI, and the SILC.

Director Van Zandt stated that she wanted to clarify that earlier it was stated that NCBVI does not currently provide any grants, and what was just mentioned may sound like a grant. Our work with Project SEARCH and PILS are contracts, not grants.

Bob Deaton reported that PILS was created because of a need for Independent Living Services in Western Nebraska. PILS is a Center for Independent Living. It is one of three in the State. The Independent Living Council is to promote independent living throughout the state. They have a mandate to serve unserved and underserved populations in the state and do what they can to bring the services where they are needed. NCBVI offers support to PILS to keep running which is mandated by the State Plan for Independent Living. The State Plan for Independent Living is reviewed every three years and it must be resubmitted to RSA for approval. Individuals in the Western part of the State need a resource for independent living services.

Director Van Zandt stated that the way we partner with the Independent Living Centers across the state, NCBVI staff work with the Independent Living Centers. This is a partnership of consultations. Many NCBVI clients have multiple disabilities and other Centers have resources that will benefit.

Commissioner Hansen noted that at first glance, some of the partnerships are not necessarily blindness related. Some of the partnerships make clear sense, but others do not.

Commissioner Hansen inquired about the City of Lincoln - Mayor's Office - Multicultural Advisory Committee.

Director Van Zandt reported that she was asked by the Mayor's Office if she would serve on this Committee. Van Zandt noted that she was appointed in spring 2011. However, the Committee does not meet in the summer so she has not yet been to a meeting. The first meeting will be in September. Van Zandt noted that the Committee is really about diversity employment in city and county government and making sure that diversity is a part of it. Disabilities and blindness is one element of the whole diversity package. She is hoping that serving on the Committee will help with employment issues for blind individuals. Pearl stated she will attend a few meetings and then make a decision as to if she feels it is good use of her time.

Commissioner Hansen inquired about the partnership with Nebraska Mobility (NeMo).

Director Van Zandt reported that NeMo is a coalition of state agencies and organizations with the mission of increasing public transportation throughout the state of Nebraska. John Schmitt attends quarterly meetings of NeMo. Van Zandt noted transportation issues are a constant issue at public forums and meetings when we ask individuals what their needs are. Van Zandt stated that she endorsed John Schmitt serving on NeMo because of transportation issues in rural areas of Nebraska. Transportation really impacts the lives of blind people. Most of the individuals who serve on NeMo do not know anything about the needs of people who cannot drive. This is why it is felt that it is good to have a presence at that table.

Commissioner Hansen inquired about the partnership with University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) - Selleck Hall.

Commissioner Hansen noted that every summer NCBVI participants in WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a work experience program for blind and visually impaired students, stay at Selleck Hall on the UNL campus. Commissioner Hansen stated that he is familiar with how the housing department works with entities during the summer to get some revenue. The groups pay to use Selleck Hall. Commissioner Hansen asked for clarification on how this is a partnership.

Bob Deaton stated that there is a history that has been established with Selleck Hall. NCBVI has used this facility over the years and they do provide accommodations and they know our needs. Selleck Hall will provide individuals to assist with lunch lines, serve as readers, etc.

Carlos Servàn noted that Selleck Hall does not only provide us services with the WAGES program where we pay for them, but Selleck Hall pays the wages for the individual who works there during the program. Also, with the Lincoln District, Selleck Hall partners in training clients to become familiar with food industry type of work. NCBVI is not charged for this training.

Director Van Zandt noted that when she first read the document she wondered how we have time to work with clients. Van Zandt asked the supervisors if they thought we were asking too much of our staff. We certainly do not want staff sitting in meetings all the time when clients need our services. The supervisors noted that they do monitor what staff is doing and they are careful about the scheduling.

Some of the partnerships are ongoing and some of the meetings that are involved may only be a few times per year. Therefore, the partnerships are not as time consuming as they may appear to be. The agency is very mindful of the activities relating to partnerships. We work to make sure that time is well spent.

Fatos Floyd noted that at the Center they get very interesting Partnerships. They work with the Shelton Art Gallery and are working to make art accessible for blind individuals. They have been working with the Homestead National Monument to make their facility accessible for the blind. At the end of the month Center clients will be going to the Art Museum in Omaha to see how their facility is accessible to the blind. Van Zandt noted that some of the partnerships, such as these are a short term basis.

The Commissioners thanked Bob Deaton for putting together the Partnership report.

Public Comment

Paulette Monthei inquired as to if the Partnership report is broken out by which partnerships are required by RSA and which partnerships may be required by existing memorandums of understanding at the State level.

Chairperson Johnson noted that some of the partnerships listed did mention they were a part of the State Plan. Johnson noted that the Partnership report that was prepared for today' Focus Topic is not an official document that was required by anything. The document was prepared as an informational tool for the Board of Commissioners.

Monthei stated that the reason she asks is because of the information is good for the State Plan. This document may be a good attachment for the State Plan. Also, for fund raising efforts, they always want to look at community partnerships. It could be a good marketing tool.

Mark Bulger stated that sometimes when speaking about vision loss and blindness it is easy to get caught up in the numbers. Bulger stated that he feels that it is equally important to be involved with other agencies. Part of blindness is promoting a good attitude about blindness. Anything that can be done in working with other agencies is well worth the time in his opinion.

Paulette Monthei had a question on the certification process. It was mentioned at the May meeting through the certification NCBVI had the O&M intern from Texas come to NCBVI to do training. Monthei asked if the funding received from this type of internship was considered general revenue and is it eligible for Federal matching funds?

Director Van Zandt reported that it is revenue. Whether it is available for match depends on the source of the funds. In this case, the funds came from the Voc Rehab agency of Texas and so they already were likely a mix of Federal and State Texas funds. If this is the case, the funds cannot be used for match. Van Zandt stated that it is definitely income and it was coded to the salary of Center staff during that time. Therefore, it was income and NCBVI uses it for the agency operations.

Ardean Kohtz stated that he is with the Nebraska Lions Foundation. He has just become the Chairman of a committee. Kohtz inquired as to steps to take when a doctor tells a person that there is no more help for their eyesight. Kohtz is looking for ways they can help these individuals.

Kohtz asked if NCBVI could be of assistance to him. Kohtz is seeking names of groups that might be helpful to individuals losing vision.

Commissioner Hansen that NCBVI can certainly give him names. The Lions Club, the VIPS group, the American Council for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind, and NCBVI. One of the ongoing things the Commission tries to do from time to time is to get material distributed to optometrists and other eye care specialists so when the question comes up in the doctor's office they have a packet that can be handed to the individual.

Chairperson Johnson stated that NCBVI staff has gone to the Nebraska Optometric Association statewide convention to present and have a booth.

Director Van Zandt stated that she believes it is so important for consumers and consumer organizations to continue to educate eye care specialists about the fact that it is not the end of the world when you lose your vision. For many medical folks, they are all about fixing the eyes. Therefore, even if they are aware of resources they do not always tell people. NCBVI wants people to treat their eyes when possible, but also wants people to be aware of resources that are out there. This is an ongoing educational effort.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she will compile a list of resources and agencies that could be helpful to individuals who are newly blind. Paulette mentioned that she already has a list. Paulette will forward her list. Commissioner Johnson stated that the most difficult part is getting eye care specialists to hand out the information. Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI also has a list of resources on its website.

Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI staff does give talks to Lions Clubs. Ardean Kohtz asked if someone could present at their next Foundation meeting which will be in Hastings. Commissioner Oltman stated she would be willing to present at their next meeting since she lives in Hastings. Kohtz and Commissioner Oltman will discuss the logistics of the presentation.

Break – A 15 minute break was taken; the meeting resumed at 10:36 a.m.

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 – August 6, 2011

New Voc Rehab Counselor for Kearney is attending today: Cristal Grado. She is currently in Center training.

This past quarter has been very busy. Among many other things, I joined in on the Walk across the Bridge from Nebraska to Iowa with the Hand in Hand Deaf-Blind Peer Support Group, participated in the National SRC & Boards Networking Conference Call, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind Conference Calls monthly, attended National Blindness Professionals Certification Board Meeting, Regional Directors Meeting, American Foundation for the Blind Trustees Meeting, ACB National Convention, NFB National Convention. I also participated in staff training on Motivational Interviewing and was a panelist, presenting on Project SEARCH, at the Nebraska Department of Education's Administrators Days. I was a part of the closing seminar of Project Independence (PI) and the WAGES Banquet. Both were excellent programs!

I plan to travel to each office at least once each year. The trips might coincide with the Governor's Staff Awards in the fall, when employees are recognized for the years they have worked for the State of Nebraska. However, when I do visit the offices, I will schedule it so that I spend time with the staff, possibly going on some visits to clients and employers. I'll be

working this out with folks, so that the timing works well for all involved. I will also schedule similar connections with Lincoln District. We see each other more often, but I've not spent time with individuals for a long time.

After Conferring with State Personnel, I gave information to Center Staff so they could proceed to work on Position Description Questionnaires relating to the classification of their positions. This project is a result of the Commission Staff Survey comments asking for Center positions to be assessed as possible Program Specialists.

Work continued on the State Plan, after comments for revisions were received from R.S.A. This will be finalized in the next week, if at all possible.

Nebraska Center for the Blind

Total Full-time Clients served from 1996 through August, 2011: 192. 87.5 percent achieved their employment goal: 109 Competitive Employment and 23 Home Makers. 41 are still Students (27% of the total). Only 9.8 are not working (down from 10.5% in May).

Center Activities this past quarter:

Wages staff training

Wages participants, first time we had 5 clients came to the center part time and worked part time.

Fishing activity

Picnic

Taking country dancing lessons

Dancing activity

Attend Christian Record's accessible garden opening

Horseback riding and paddle boating at Mahoney

Swimming at the lake

Field Services

For the first eight months of Federal Fiscal Year 2011 (October 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011), we served 490 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. 36 were closed having achieved their employment goals. 46 were closed without achieving employment. The reasons included refusing further services, unable to locate, failure to cooperate, transfers to other agency, and other. In the Independent Living (IL) track, from October 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011, we served 676 clients in all statuses. 153 were closed successfully. 42 were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, institutionalized, and other reasons).

Deputy Directors and North Platte District

We purchased three iPhones to be used by our technology staff, so they can learn to use it and be able to teach our clients. The idea is also to determine if it is fully accessible so we might not have to buy note takers and digital readers in cases where the iPhone would meet the client's needs.

We hired Cristal Grado for the Kearney VR counselor position. She is in the beginning of the second month of her training.

WAGES ended on July 29, 2011. Two of the students got job offers to continue beyond the program.

NBE: Don and Carlos talked to Department of Roads (DOR) to negotiate new utilities fees for the snack machines on I-80.

We also need to come-up with a new agreement with DOR, as the one we currently have is over 12 years old. They are working on putting together a Request for Proposals (RFP) for having snack machines in their Lincoln building. We will explore this also at the Omaha DOR building.

The state office building in Omaha will put out a RFP in August.

The post office in Lincoln is giving us 5 new locations with 40-50 employees on each building. We send out an announcement to see if a current vendor want to run such locations, get a new vendor, or contract out with a third party.

We put a new sandwich machine with credit card access at the GI rest stop. We will evaluate if this brings more revenue.

We are finalizing the NBE annual training. Both the NFB and ACB vendors Divisions will send a representative to talk. We encourage current NBE vendors to attend, as well as clients who are interested in the program.

The 30 second PSA is done and the Placement Committee is working on distributing it to TV stations across the State of Nebraska.

The Scottsbluff office has moved into temporary new quarters, due to a rise in the water table which caused flooding in our office there. A move into a permanent location is anticipated within the next two months or so, but we don't know where that will be located.

Angie and Dan participated in staff training on July 23rd and 24th via remote telecommunications from Lincoln.

That experience was less than what we had hoped, and it will not be repeated unless there are no other alternative solutions.

Jan Brandt attended the NFB National Convention in Orlando.

Two campers from the North Platte district participated in Project Independence (a total of 7 participated altogether.)

Dan Hill provided testimony in a law suit brought by a VR client against Burlington Northern. This suit has been in the works for almost seven years, but just recently came to court. The Commission was not a party to the suit, but we were called to testify about blindness, the capabilities of the individual, and of blind people in general. We do not know any results yet.

Early reports indicate that counselors are putting the DVD instructional series "Pathways to Independence" to good use. We also continue to hear compliments about it from other states and there are a lot of hits on the videos on U-Tube, especially the cane travel piece.

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

This quarter we had clients get jobs as an Orientation Counselor in New Mexico, an internship with Senator Nelson's office, a phone interviewer, and environmental services technician. We also had a WAGES client, who will continue a part time position at Selleck Hall while he is attending the Center. A former client contacted Connie about getting a promotion to management at Verizon Wireless. Several of our clients were working this summer at temporary positions. One of our clients was a WAGES counselor, another worked the summer program in Baltimore and one worked in Colorado during their summer program. TMC0 (a local company) is very interested in hiring someone for their office as well as some of their production jobs. Connie will take two clients to meet them on Aug. 8th.

Staff was involved in Motivational Interviewing training. Larry Roos attended a Traumatic Brain Injury conference this month. We will start a new GATE program this month.

Omaha District Update – Nancy Flearl

Our group teaching sessions for older blind individuals will be starting again in August. About 12 people have indicated an interest in being a part of the program.

We have staff that have worked most of the transition programs this summer and doing this in addition to their other duties. Likewise John Schmitt has continued to take more referrals to assist the Kearney office. Glenn is taking all the older blind referrals and both are traveling an extensive area. Cheryl Poff has been taking some older blind referrals to assist the Lincoln District. The team is valued and appreciated for all they bring to NCBVI.

We now have 10-12 younger students working in group teaching on IL skills and four of these students and their families attended Project Independence. With the flooding it was cancelled and an abbreviated version held at Aurora youth Leadership Center. Having a parent component was real good and hopes we continue to have that as a part of the program.

Aside from changing our plans with Project Independence we have also been struggling with the flood waters in Omaha. Our office is in the flood zone and state cars are now moved across the street to protect from flood waters and sewage backups. They continue to fear the levee system as they are not constructed to sustain such a high volume of water for such a long period of time.

To say the least the summer has flown by.

Referrals remain pretty steady. We have had several referrals from area school districts that are also encouraging.

Several people have found employment. A couple has started at Outlook Nebraska. One started at Cox Communication in Accounting Services. Another in food service with Elkhorn Public Schools, a Marketing Manager and a customer care representative at Marriott. Have assisted several people in retaining their employment as a Medical Transcriptionist, and Upholstery Cleaner.

We have had a bit of struggle in finding some additional drivers to have available for daily use. We have 2 exceptional individuals that support us, I have hired one more and could easily use another.

Our focus topic for this meeting is partnerships. I attended Marriott's 40th Anniversary Celebration on July 27th. I remember making those partnerships to establish workstations and provide employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals. They continue to serve us in talking to other employers on how effective JAWS works in employment setting, creating further opportunities for our consumers. They currently have 30% of their workforce working from home and employ 12 blind and/or visually impaired individuals at this time.

Business Office

Bill Brown – Business Manager

Federal Grants Training

RSA Monitoring Initiative

Close out State Fiscal year

Transfer fund from Trust Fund to Cash Fund

Work on State Fiscal year Budget 2012

Work on new phone for Omaha and new printer/copier/fax for Administration

Records Retention Schedule

Scottsbluff Office and housing issues

Set up Grant Coding for SFY 2012

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

June 2, 2011 – Attended a PHRUG (Payroll HR User Group) meeting along with Dave Robinson.

June 28, 2011 – Attended the State of Nebraska Charitable Giving Campaign Kick-Off at the Governor's residence.

June 28, 2011 – Attended an IIF (Interactive Informational Forum) along with Dave Robinson. These are sponsored by State Personnel.

July 20, 2011 – Completed surplus of non-working electronics and non-working vending machines.

Completed Fixed Asset Inventory Bar Code Scanning for NCBVI Division 001. Inventory must be completed by August 31 of each year.

Dave Robinson – Personnel Officer

Open enrollment was completed on May 20, 2011 and there were no error notifications sent to us, so open enrollment for 2011 was successful.

June 6, 2011 – Cristal Grado started with the agency. She fills the vacancy created by Sara Stewart's departure from the Kearney office.

June 6, 2011 – Attended a PHRUG (Payroll HR User Group) meeting, where we were informed of the development of LINK. LINK is a software system that will be a "one-stop" place for users of the state's computer systems. Instead of having to go to several different applications/sites, the user will be able to go to LINK and log into all applications that they have access to.

June 28, 2011 – Attended an IIF (Interactive Informational Forum) and we were given a preview of the Performance Evaluation module of the state's talent management system. The state will finally have one performance evaluation format, statewide, to be used by all agencies. It appears to be a positive enhancement and will require active participation by both the employee and Supervisor. It's web based, so will require some computer skills by everyone. We have stressed the issue of accessibility with the people involved in this development and will continue to be alert to potential problems as it is developed.

Report from the Chairperson

Chairperson Johnson reported that she continues to be a member of the Lions Club Vision and Hearing Committee.

Commissioner Johnson attends the local VIPS meetings.

Commissioner Johnson will apply for reappointment to the Board in December 2011.

Commissioner Johnson attended the ACB National Convention in Las Vegas. She is working on preparing a report regarding the convention. Commissioner Jirak thanked Johnson for attending the convention.

Commissioner Jirak reported that on June 30 ACB presented to WAGES students in Lincoln. Dustin Wardyn video recorded the presentation and Jirak has a copy of the DVD at his home.

Commissioner Johnson requested to attend the NFB State Convention this fall in Lincoln.

Commissioner Oltman moved to approve Johnson's request.

Commissioner Walla seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion, except Johnson who abstained.

Commissioner Oltman reported that she attended the National NFB convention in Orlando, Florida. Governor Paterson of New York gave a presentation. He spoke in protest to a bill that is currently in Congress regarding subminimum wages to people with disabilities and the proposed Workforce Investment Act. Governor Paterson states that Congress should strike the language from the bill that discriminates against Americans with disabilities and ensure that there is equal pay for equal work.”

Old Business

Budget Update

Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI is doing fine with our current budget. The agency does have carryover each year with grants. The counselors are very good at making sure that clients receive the services stated in their Individualized Employment Plan, but they are budget minded. This is a cost balancing act and they prioritize what a client needs, while assuring that clients are able to make informed choices about services.

NCBVI will reapply for reallocation of federal funds by August 15. The agency has requested reallocation in the past; this year we expect to request \$300,000. The supervisors are putting together a list of ideas for the use of the funds. We should know by early September if funds were granted. Van Zandt pointed out that when NCBVI requests funds we look to see that we can match the funds. The Feds want to ensure that they will continue to fund states at the same level. The funds received also cannot throw off the Maintenance of Effort. Everything must be allowed under the Rehab Act.

Discuss and Act on State Plan Revisions 2012

The commissioners received an email from Director Van Zandt regarding the revisions to the State Plan. Van Zandt noted that she had received some good comments from Paulette Monthei at the May 2011 meeting and she did incorporate some of those ideas into the State Plan. Van Zandt stated that she has received feedback from RSA and they have requested a few more specifics. Van Zandt will move ahead with the changes and hopes to have them completed by August 13.

NFB Newsline® update

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®

August 1, 2011

Jamie K. Forbis, Out Reach Coordinator

As predicted in my last report the summer months have been slow for NFB-Newsline®. The only exception is the addition of store circulars to Newsline's expansive line-up. At this time the only circular available is Target, but others are soon to follow. Next time you log in to NFB-Newsline® choose option 6 from the main menu to discover all the wonderful sales at Target!

This quarter's stats can be found below. I've just listed each month's stats instead of boring you with my commentary as I know you're anxious to conclude the meeting and step out into the heat of the day! Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions and, as always, happy reading!

May 2011

Registered Users: 1,516

New Registrations: 10

Total Calls: 1,238

Total Call Minutes: 19,891

Total State Newspaper Accesses: 4,640

Total State Channel Accesses: 122

Total TV Listing Accesses: 380

Average Call Length: 16.01

Percent Local Calls: 45.83

June 2011

Registered Users: 1,522

New Registrations: 5

Total Calls: 1,124

Total Call Minutes: 17,991

Total State Newspaper Accesses: 4,640

Total State Channel Accesses: 122

Total TV Listing Accesses: 380

Average Call Length: 16.01

Percent Local Calls: 45.83

July 2011

Registered Users: 1,524

New Registrations: 2

Total Calls: 1,196

Total Call Minutes: 20,745

Total State Newspaper Accesses: 4,315

Total State Channel Accesses: 102

Total TV Listing Accesses: 508

Average Call Length: 17.35

Percent Local Calls: 44.21

Client Assistance Program Complaints or Issues

Client Assistance Program (CAP) – Victoria Rasmussen

A client disagreed with computer training and trainer: This individual had received an assessment while working with the Commission that offered the best way to provide training because of his disability. He felt the Commission did not follow the recommendations of the assessment/evaluation. I met with the counselor, client and office director. The Commission shared their concerns when attempts were made to provide training and the client shared his concerns. It was agreed that the first step to be done is to review the evaluation together and determine how the recommendations can be achieved and the client will need to make himself completely available for training.

Another situation was a contact from a minor client's mother who shared concerns about services. The mother did not want CAP to pursue this any further. CAP offered her advice and suggestions on how to communicate concerns with the counselor and encouraged her to contact CAP again if she felt there was a need.

Commissioner Johnson noted that from the survey results that are being forwarded to the commissioners she has noted that many clients say that they are not aware of CAP. Van Zandt reported that currently the counselor will officially tell the clients about CAP throughout the process and not just at the referral. Van Zandt noted that CAP speaks to all new staff about their process and also speaks on-going at the Center.

The commissioners requested that CAP give a brief 15 to 20 minute presentation at the November 19 Commission meeting in Lincoln. Kathy Stephens will contact CAP to see if this can be arranged.

Discuss Randolph-Sheppard Program Cafeteria in Ashland

Director Van Zandt reported that the cafeteria in Ashland is at the National Guard Camp. It is different than any of the vending opportunities in that it is a more complicated setting. It is also much more involved in terms of the dollar amounts of everything involved. Typically with Business Enterprise settings at Military facilities, state agencies will contract with a “teaming partner” (a big company that is in the business of food service). NCBVI Business Enterprise started out that way with an entity out of California being the teaming partner who payrolls the whole thing, etc. The blind vendor is the manager of the facility. Our contract allowed for cancelling the contract based on specifics related to breach of contract. NCBVI did just end its relationship with that company and terminated the contract. The individual blind vendor has been able to establish himself and NCBVI is now contracting directly with the blind vendor to run the entire operation.

Director Van Zandt reported that companies who were bringing in the food and employees of the cafeteria are still owed money. Carlos Serván noted that employees are still owed vacation time and pay. In general, employees were getting paid, but they were getting paid late. This was one of the main reasons the contract was terminated. Van Zandt noted that the agency does not take terminating a contract lightly. The State Attorney General’s office was involved and offered advice. Van Zandt noted that so far the transition has been smooth.

Commissioner Hansen asked if the money due to the employees and the vendors is a debt of the company in California and not a responsibility of our vendor. Van Zandt noted that this is correct; the debt is not a responsibility of our vendor.

Public Comment

Howard Compton asked, in light of the recent announcement by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) that it has filed suit against the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), he would like to know if either the NCBVI or the Commissioners Board has decided to withhold the recommendation of clients to BNSF. If not, why not?

Commissioner Hansen stated that it is a mechanic that was working for BNSF. He was let go, even though he had been working that position for quite some time. BNSF was using his blindness as a reason he was fired. The situation has escalated to this point.

Director Van Zandt stated that NCBVI's piece in the situation is that the Commission has been informed of it and one of our staff members was asked to testify in the lawsuit.

Compton stated his question is has the NCBVI withheld the recommendation of clients to BNSF, either by the Commission itself or by the Commissioners Board? Are we recommending that clients be withheld from BNSF?

Director Van Zandt stated that the Commission has not stopped clients from applying at BNSF; however counselors in every office as they are working with clients who are looking for that type of job will inform the client of the types of problems others have had with that company. The counselor will give the client the facts. Regardless, it is the client's choice if they want to apply to work at a company.

Commissioner Oltman stated the way she understands the case is that even though the client had worked at BNSF for several years as a mechanic, BNSF stated his blindness would be dangerous for him to do that job and they let him go. However, the client had been working there for some time and he never had problems and he had never been hurt.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she believes a counselor should present options, opportunities and information to clients and they should choose the avenue they wish to pursue.

Compton stated that with all due respect, his question has still not been answered. His question is if NCBVI has not decided to withhold the recommendation of clients to the BNSF or other jobs, regardless of what job it is, he is worried about NCBVI taking the stance that we are not sending clients to the company because there is smoke over there. Is the NCBVI going to withhold that recommendation to a client in the future?

Howard Compton stated that his final comment is that he requests this Commissioners Board not to act on any innuendos or hearsay evidence to make a decision. Thank you very much.

Paulette Monthei stated that her comments come about from Commissioner Jirak asking her about resources. The National Accreditation Council (NAC) is a private 501(C)(3) company who does evaluations on both private and federal entities serving individuals who are blind and visually impaired. This company could be one that NCBVI could seek additional certification from or use it as a supplement to the existing certification.

NAC is not affiliated with NFB or ACB, however they are a member of the Private Agencies for the Blind and Visually Impaired which is now Vision Serve Alliance. This could also be a way to use some of the extra funds the agency is applying for. Paulette provided contact information for this company. The website is www.nacasb.org

Commissioner Hansen asked Monthei if she is aware of other state agencies that have certification through them. Monthei stated that this information is listed on their website.

A lunch break was taken at 12 noon. The meeting resumed at 1:00 p.m.

Public Comment – continued

Mark Bulger stated his question is a follow-up to the statistics that were given regarding the Orientation Center. Bulger stated that in doing the math, it appears that 12 to 13 clients go through the Center each year. Director Van Zandt noted that the figures that she gives each quarter does not reflect others who go through the training such as agency staff, or short stays. Also, lots of individuals come through the Center for a tour. Fatos Floyd noted that the statistics also do not include the deceased, part-time clients, or those who started training but did not complete for some reason. The statistics only include clients who graduate from Center Training.

Mark Bulger stated that he will not argue the success at the NCBVI Training Center. He does caution when comparing Nebraska to other states. Bulger asked if Nebraska is getting high results because only the best of the best clients are going through the Center. Director Van Zandt stated that this is a question that has been raised from time to time.

The truth is that NCBVI serves individuals with multiple disabilities and many who have pretty major issues that they are dealing with including mental health and physical disabilities. Many clients who are in the Center these days are definitely individuals with multiple challenges. Center clients are not “hand-picked.”

Mark Bulger stated that it is great that NCBVI has high standards and a high success rate.

New Business

Discuss and Act on Renewal of National Blindness Professional Certification (NBPCB)

Director Van Zandt noted that she had shared with the Commissioners the email she received from Dr. Edward Bell, the Director of the Louisiana Tech University Center on Blindness and staff person who does all the support work for the NBPCB. Dr. Bell recently notified NCBVI that the three year certification approval which applies to the Nebraska Center for the Blind would be up and they would assign another person to come to renew the certification. They simply needed the commitment from NCBVI to come and do that. The issue had been discussed in length at the May Board meeting and there was no specific order to do one thing or the other. Therefore, because of the value of the certification “the agency approval” already has paid financially a lot back to the agency, more than it cost, and NCBVI also benefitted from having an intern who helped to carry the workload of travel training in the Center, as well establishes the agency that has and maintains a Training Center that is based on structured discovery approach and a consumer focus, she did inform Dr. Bell that NCBVI wants to recertify.

An appointment has not yet been made for an evaluator to make a site visit to the Center to tour all areas of the facilities and living quarters, but they will send someone to do the recertification visit. The cost of recertification is \$3,000.

Commissioner Jirak asked if the recertification is a part of State law. Director Van Zandt stated it is not. Commissioner Jirak asked how LB 445 ties into the certification. Director Van Zandt stated that the only thing between the two that is similar is the word certification. Other than that, they are two distinct and different issues. The National Blindness Professional Certification "Agency Approval" relates only to the certification of the Training Center. It has nothing to do with LB 445. The State law, LB 445, requires NCBVI to provide qualification and certification for vocational rehabilitation counselors for the blind. A certified vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind must have a bachelor's degree from an appropriate educational program approved by the Executive Director of the Commission, 600 hours of intensive training under supervision at the Commission's Training Center, and completion of appropriate training as approved by the Executive Director. Each certified vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind shall, in the period since his or her certificate was issued or last renewed, complete continuing competency requirements as set forth by the Commission under the Executive Director's approval. NCBVI has a written procedure for Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind Recertification Requirements. Currently all NCBVI field counselors and Center counselors possess a valid CVRCB certificate. By State law, only Voc Rehab Counselors are required to be certified, but Orientation counselors and Center staff have also all chosen to be certified. There is value to it in terms of ongoing education that can be accessed. Some staff may also want to have it so they would be qualified to apply for a VR Counselor position if there was an opening. This certification has nothing to do with the National Blindness Certification Board. Director Van Zandt noted that it is important for it to be clear that the Certification for Vocational Rehab Counselors for the Blind and the certification by the National Blindness Certification Board are not related.

The National Blindness Certification Board certifies agency Orientation Centers, Orientation and Mobility counselors and individuals who are qualified in Braille literacy. These certifications are not required by State law.

The National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) will provide approval to orientation centers for the purpose of providing immersion and training related to certification and continuing education. The primary focus of approval is that the orientation center be consumer driven, (i.e., is consumer-based in its model of rehabilitation). To be consumer-driven, a center must not only collaborate with consumer organizations of the blind, but maintain concerted efforts towards establishing Structured Discovery methods and an empowering philosophy about training. The NBPCB has an approval plan which is designed to determine whether an orientation center meets standards which make it a consumer-based program.

Director Van Zandt reiterated that the National Blindness Certification Board only deals with certification of the Agency Center. State law, LB 445, only deals with certifying Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind in Nebraska.

View Public Service Announcement for NCBVI

Director Van Zandt reported that the Placement Committee developed a 30 second Public Service Announcement (PSA). Today we are going to view and listen to it. Commissioner Hansen also audio described what was being viewed.

Carlos Serván noted that in the first part of the video they show individuals doing things, but it does not show that they are blind. The second part of the video shows the same people doing the same things but shows them as blind. This conveys the message that sighted or blind, individuals can do the same things.

Commissioner Johnson asked how the PSA is being used. Van Zandt reported that we are in the process of getting it out to television stations across the state and it will also be placed on U Tube. There was also talk about airing it on radio stations; however radio stations may want a different format.

---Shirley Allen noted that if the sound track was just a little bit slower it could be used on her radio program at Radio Talking Book. The Placement Committee will look into getting this accomplished.

Director Van Zandt thanked Dan Bird for bringing the equipment to play the PSA.

Discuss and act on version of Roberts Rules of Order to be used for NCBVI Board meetings

Chairperson Johnson noted that at the May Commission Board meeting the Commissioners voted to use Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised 10th Edition for Board meetings. It was noted that the 11th edition will come out in September 2011. The commissioners revisited what version to adopt for Board meeting use.

Commissioner Jirak moved to adopt Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised 11th Edition.

Commissioner Walla seconded the motion.

Commissioner Hansen questioned whether the Commission wanted to adopt the 11th Edition without reviewing the published edition. The commissioners agreed that this was a good point.

Commissioner Jirak withdrew his motion.

Commissioner Walla withdrew his second.

This item will be tabled until the November 19, 2011 Commission Board Meeting in order that the 11th edition can be reviewed before it is adopted. Commissioner Hansen volunteered to review and report on the 11th edition at the November meeting. It was decided to purchase an electronic version as soon as it is published to see if it is accessible.

Commissioner Johnson noted that whatever Roberts Rules of Order says, State Law precludes what is said in Roberts Rules of Order.

Discuss and act on approval of travel for staff in accordance with state statutes

Director Van Zandt noted that information came out during a meeting that State law requires all travel of staff of state agencies to be pre-approved. This includes travel in state and out state.

Currently for out of state travel all staff must complete a form that says where they are going, why they are going there, the cost, how it will be funded, etc. and this must be pre-approved by their immediate supervisor and by the executive director. This is done by all staff for out of state travel.

Supervisors manage in state travel by getting itineraries from staff and reviewing them on an on-going basis. However, staff is not required to check in with their supervisor every morning to get an okay for in state travel as this would not be manageable. What was discussed with Administrative Services in terms of how the agency could comply with the law regarding in state travel. Administrative Services recommended that each year the Board of Commissioners would have a motion to pre-approve travel that is related to the purpose of the staff person's position. Business Manager Bill Brown put together a proposed motion for the Board to approve.

Commissioner Jirak moved:

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired approves all employee in-state business travel and/or out of state business travel within 60 miles of the border of Nebraska in any adjoining state, which relates directly to the provision of services to a client, i.e. employer visit, medical appointment, service referral, employment interview, etc. All other out of state business travel is approved if granted approval by the Executive Director of the agency. This motion is in effect until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners after April 1, 2012.

Commissioner Hansen seconded.

A roll call vote and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Each year at the May meeting when the Board does the evaluation of the executive director, makes a decision regarding retaining the director, pay level and time sheet approval, they will also make a motion on staff in-state travel. Kathy Stephens will develop a template to be used for incorporating these four motions.

Discuss and act on Audio/video streaming of board meetings

Director Van Zandt reported that Bill Brown, Kathy Stephens and Dottie Wilmott did some research about audio/video streaming of board meetings. The biggest thing learned is that there is a lot more to learn. Much of the streaming of conventions, conferences and meetings are strictly where you go on line and listen and watch, but they do not allow participation. Director Van Zandt asked what the purpose of audio/video streaming would be. Would it be for viewing and listening purposes only, or would it include letting individuals participate in the meeting. Director Van Zandt reminded the commissioners that the meetings are currently audio recorded and the recordings are put on the NCBVI website. There is a technical piece that would need to be figured out.

Commissioner Hansen noted that the way the Open Meeting Act is currently written, audio/video streaming of board meetings is not allowed under State law.

The Open Meeting Act states: "84-1407. Act, how cited. Sections 84-1407 to 84-1414 shall be known and may be cited as the Open Meetings Act....

84-1409...

3) Videoconferencing means conducting a meeting involving participants at two or more locations through the use of audio-video equipment which allows participants at each location to hear and see each meeting participant at each other location, including public input. Interaction between meeting participants shall be possible at all meeting locations....

84-1411...(2)(b) Reasonable arrangements are made to accommodate the public's right to attend, hear, and speak at the meeting, including seating, recordation by audio or visual recording devices, and a reasonable opportunity for input such as public comment or questions to at least the same extent as would be provided if videoconferencing or telephone conferencing was not used;

(c) At least one copy of all documents being considered is available to the public at each site of the videoconference or telephone conference;

(d) At least one member of the state entity, advisory committee, or governing body is present at each site of the videoconference or telephone conference; and

(e) No more than one-half of the state entity's, advisory committees, or governing body's meetings in a calendar year are held by videoconference or telephone conference.

Videoconferencing, telephone conferencing, or conferencing by other electronic communication shall not be used to circumvent any of the public government purposes established in the Open Meetings Act....”

The Commissioners decided to not pursue the issue of audio/video streaming of Commission Board meetings.

Public Comment

Jeff Altman stated he is here to give some background on the National Blind Professionals Certification Board. Altman noted that he holds a National Orientation Mobility Certification for Trainers (NOMCT). Altman stated that he is a board member of the NBPCB and he was involved with Dr. Bell in developing the approval process.

Part of the reason that the approval process was initiated is because there are a number of agencies out there who claim they offer structured discovery and many do not. Therefore, it was felt that something was needed to clarify to both professionals and consumers what that meant. An approval process was established. The approval was to show that an organization was using true structured discovery, that is was a consumer centered approach to rehabilitation and that the tools and methodology of structured discovery were in fact being used and used consistently. The main thing they wanted was the approval process to serve as a source of feedback to the organization and not simply a pass/fail situation. The NBPCB offers feedback to agencies that need to improve in certain areas. The approval is not simply a label that an agency puts on their website. It is something that shows that that agency or organization is really using the best quality methodologies and approaches in the field of blindness and they use true structured discovery.

Jeff Altman suggested that at a future Board meeting, the Commissioners have some individuals who are training in structured discovery come present about how it works.

Jeff also mentioned to Director Van Zandt that the NBPCB offers the National Certification Literary Braille. Jeff encourages the agency to begin promoting that idea among orientation counselors throughout the agency.

Commissioner Walla stated that Structured Discovery would make a good Focus Topic.

Bob Deaton stated that he wanted to speak about CARF. Before he came to work for the agency he worked at a Sheltered Workshop in Southwestern Minnesota back in the early 1980's. At that time, the State of Minnesota had just passed legislation requiring all sheltered workshops become CARF Certified. CARF is very much operational and it is focused.

It looks at the financial management of the organization, record management and client services in terms of whether the elements are present. The State of Minnesota was basically asking that any tax dollars given to support sheltered workshops have some stamp of approval in terms of business practices. CARF certification was assurance enough for the State of Minnesota. Deaton noted that CARF would be redundant to a State Agency as RSA monitors us. Also CARF is very expensive. One certification does not fit all. CARF worked well for the sheltered workshop in ways, but it is not necessary for a state agency.

Director Van Zandt added that RSA does a very thorough job in monitoring state agencies to ensure that state agencies comply with the Rehab Act.

Howard Compton inquired as to if the Board has appointed a parliamentarian for Roberts Rules of Order. Howard urged the Board to appoint one and publicly announce who it is.

Commissioner Hansen stated that the Commission Board has previously stated that Kathy Stephens is the parliamentarian. Mike Hansen will check with Robert's Rules of Order to see what the requirement is to be a parliamentarian and he will report back what he finds.

Shirley Allen inquired as to what a vocational rehabilitation counselor needs to do to get certified and where do they go to get certification.

Director Van Zandt noted that certification of vocational rehabilitation counselors is required by State law, LB 445. The Executive Director of NCBVI issues the certification. The agency has a list of requirements for recertification and they must reapply for certification every three years.

Mark Bulger stated he wanted to talk briefly about the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Mark stated that he has read all the text on the National Blindness Professional Certification Board website. Bulger stated that as he sees it structured discovery consists of a methodology which is based on non-vision so those with residual vision must wear sleep shades. Structured discovery is based on a philosophy which is having a positive attitude about blindness and a consumer emphasis. Bulger pointed out that there are different consumer groups with different philosophies and there are different people in different states. He stated that he sees the certification as a way to certify the services that the agency provides. For example, the Orientation Center uses structured discovery, therefore, it would make sense to have certification in this area. Everything that he has read on the certification process shows that it is Orientation Center driven. An Orientation Center is a more lengthy process and commitment for a client. While he believes structured discovery may be best in that case, his question is when we have a certification for the NCBVI stating that we are structured discovery, does that exclude low vision support and low vision methods.

Director Van Zandt stated that it does not exclude low vision support and low vision methods. The reason that the certification of the Orientation Training Center is called agency approval could be discussed. It the Center that is being certified not the agency as a whole. Van Zandt stated that Dr. Edward Bell has offered to come and speak to the Board of Commissioners to further explain.

Van Zandt noted that in the agency field services and in the Center on evenings and weekends, low vision alternatives are used. Most blind people do have some vision. Using non-visual techniques gives them confidence and it helps them determine what things their vision does work for and what things it does not.

Van Zandt stated that it really is about informed choice and learning the different techniques. In the field there is definitely training and counseling that is done through the whole process so clients will be able to succeed in whatever job they go to.

Mark Bulger stated that structured discovery is a non-visual certification. He stated that he believes NCBVI has very qualified instructors in that area. Bulger noted that there is structured discovery and guided discovery. Guided discovery is a separate methodology. What he has seen from writings of Dr. Bell is that structured discovery and guided discovery cannot exist together. An agency is either structured discovery or not. Mark Bulger stated that he does not mind structured discovery being taught in the Center, but NCBVI is a statewide agency and we need to serve all clients and their needs. He stated that he would hope that NCBVI would continually examine what methods of learning may be best for our consumers.

Commissioner Johnson noted that clients can receive the same type of training in the field that is offered in the Center. The training is just not as intensive. If a client does not learn well in their own home and the Training Center does not fit their needs, there is always the option that the client could go to another state that offers the type of training that best meets their needs. If a client wanted to go to residential training and they only want to take Braille and computers, they could do that out of state. There are some Training Centers in the country that do not use sleep shades. If a client would choose to go there and they can develop the rationale, NCBVI would review it and most likely approve it. If a client wants to only learn specific skills they can be taught these in the field or the agency may contract with someone to teach them the specific skills they want.

Fatos Floyd invited Mark Bulger and Jim Jirak to come spend a few days at the Center in order to experience the training. Fatos noted that when you read about structured discovery it can be a foreign concept. In order to fully understand it a person must experience it. Mark Bulger and Jim Jirak committed to accepting Fatos Floyd's invitation.

Election of Board Positions

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

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

Commissioner Oltman moved to elect Mike Hansen as Vice Chairperson.

Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion.

Commissioners Oltman and Hansen voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioners Walla, Jirak and Johnson voted against the motion.

The motion failed.

Commissioner Walla moved to re-elect Jim Jirak as Vice Chairperson.

Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion.

Commissioners Walla, Jirak and Johnson voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioners Hansen and Oltman voted against the motion.

The motion passed.

Commissioner Walla moved to elect Mike Hansen as Executive Secretary. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

The commissioners were congratulated on their appointments.

Executive Session Discussion of Personnel Policy

Commissioner Jirak moved to go into Executive Session at 3:12 p.m. to discuss personnel policy. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Walla moved to come out of Executive Session at 3:22 p.m.

Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Public comment

Bob Deaton stated he wanted to comment on new staff training. At the end of new staff training he generally has a discussion about field practice. In the Center there is an intense focus on structured discovery. Deaton stated that before staff go into the field it is important that they are aware of other approaches to training. Deaton stated that he tells field staff that they need to be eclectic and they need to go with what works. This does not always mean structured discovery. Structured discovery is fine when it does work, but that informed choice is always incorporated into decisions.

An example would be that it can be a big frustration for someone who has short term memory loss or traumatic brain injury, etc. Some people cannot problem solve. Deaton stated that he reminds field staff that they can contract with someone if they do not have time to provide a client with the specific training they want. This is typical practice for NCBVI.

Carlos Serván stated that he would like to find a way to resolve the issues of structured discovery. Serván stated that it is clear to him that people feel that because the Center uses structured discovery training, it is a NFB Center or the NCBVI has the NFB philosophy. He stated that when he read the story of structured discovery, it was not called structured discovery. It was a method used in California; however, it was not called structured discovery at the time. Structured discovery was not discovered by NFB. Serván noted that at the Iowa Blind, the director who was an ACB member used structured discovery. He stated that he wanted the commissioners to know that it is not about ACB or NFB, structured discovery is simply a method used in training to serve blind people.

Fatos Floyd stated she feels that there is a lot of misunderstanding about what structured discovery is. People can read about it. Floyd encouraged people to come observe it. She stated that the Center does not use structured discovery to the extreme. At the Center they use techniques that work. Some clients have secondary disabilities and structured discovery does not work. The Center does not tell those clients that structured discovery does not work so you need to leave. Some clients learn by memorization. Floyd noted that the Center currently has a client that needs one on one work and they contract this out. If this is the method they need to get more skills, this is the method that they will use. For low vision, they allow clients to use CCTV, zoom text, etc. when they are at the apartments and on the weekends. They allow clients to have a choice. At the end, a client will make the decision as to what works for them. Fatos

also noted that structured discovery does not mean sleep shades. Sleep shades are simply a tool such as a white cane.

Jim Jirak stated that he agrees that there is the misconception that structured discovery means the use of sleep shades. Jirak stated that his concern was that if field services did not work for a client because they needed more training, then they should be able to come to the Center and choose the training they want. They should not have to go through the training for things they already know.

Fatos Floyd stated that every training facility has its own curriculum. The Center does make individual changes, but not from the core. If a client comes to the Center and says they know JAWS, but they want to learn Excel, that is what they do. Floyd noted that one way to get rid of misconceptions about structured discovery is to just go and learn it for yourself.

Mark Bulger stated that he apologizes if he has offended anyone in anyway. Bulger stated that one must understand that not everyone can pick up and leave their family to attend the Center for training. Chairperson Johnson noted that Bulger has a lot of questions about the Center and she suggested that discussion on this issue cease until after he has had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience at the Center. Bulger stated he welcomes the opportunity. Bulger stated that he will write down some questions and send them to the Board.

Shirley Allen thanked NCBVI staff and commissioners for the fruits of their labor. She was very complimentary about the work that they do.

Final Announcements

Director Van Zandt announced that NCBVI has 'luggage wraps' available to put around a suitcase handle. The wraps have the agency logo on them. The items were handed out to those present. The agency got them as a public information item. They are for the purpose of helping people remember the NCBVI and they are good conversation starters.

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be Saturday, November 19, 2011 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be Center Apartment Resource Position.

Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 19, 2011 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Julie Johnson, Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Board of Commissioners

Focus Topic Summary Report

Date: August 6, 2011

By: Bob Deaton, Deputy Director - IL

RE: Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) collaborates and interacts with other agencies and organizations on many different levels. These levels of involvement are categorized as follows:

Grants and Financial Supports

Participation on Councils, Boards, Advisory Committees, and Special Meetings/Conference Calls

Collaboration with Other Public Service Agencies

Collaboration with Professional and Non-Profit Organizations

Collaboration with Consumer Organizations

Public Relations

Information and Referral

Grants and Financial Supports:

U.S. Department of Education (DOE) - Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) - Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

RSA is our federal partner. Its mission is “to provide leadership and resources to assist state and other agencies in providing vocational rehabilitation (VR), independent living (IL), and other services to individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence, and integration into the community and the competitive labor market.” RSA provides oversight of programs and services authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. NCBVI is the designated state unit charged with the responsibility of administering programs and services authorized by the Act for blind and visually impaired Nebraskans including Title I (vocational rehabilitation services), Title VI Part B programs (supported employment services), Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B (independent living services), and Title VII, Chapter II programs (independent living services for older individuals who are blind 55 years of age and older). A monitoring team of RSA officials will visit NCBVI in 2012 to review overall operations of Title I and VI programs.

State of Nebraska

The state of Nebraska provides a financial match to pull down federal funds for Title I programs (for each program dollar, 78.7 cents comes from the federal government and 21.3 cents is match) and Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B and Chapter 2 programs (for every program dollar, 90 cents comes from the federal government and 10 cents is match). No match is required for Title VI programs. The state of Nebraska also authorizes funding for and

Older Blind Specialist position in Kearney and an Orientation Counselor position in Omaha.

At one time, NCBVI awarded grants to organizations such as Radio Talking Book, the University of Nebraska-Omaha Low Vision Clinic, the Visually Impaired (VIPS), the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN), and the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN). At present, Panhandle Independent Living Services is the only recipient of grant funds (Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B) from NCBVI.

Panhandle Independent Living Services (PILS)

PILS is a community-based, non-profit private center for independent living located in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. PILS offers services in the four core areas of information and referral, advocacy, peer counseling, and independent living skills training promoting greater independence for people with disabilities living in the panhandle of Nebraska. PILS annually receives Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B funds in the amount of \$85,000 from VR Services and \$15,000 from NCBVI in accordance with the State Plan for Independent Living jointly developed and signed by VR Services, NCBVI, and the SILC.

NFB Newslines

NFB Newslines is a newspaper reading service accessed through a touchtone telephone. NCBVI supports the cost of bringing Newslines to Nebraska in accordance with LB 352.

NCBVI will pay The NFB \$29,692 for the service and \$4,789 for telephone access to Newsline covering the period from March 1, 2011 to February 28, 2012. NCBVI also pays an annual fee of \$5,000 to maintain the Kearney Hub on NFB Newsline.

NCBVI also applies for grants on occasion. Currently, NCBVI receives one grant from a private, nonprofit funding source as noted in the next paragraph:

Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha (PILBO)

PILBO is a program funded by the Enrichment Foundation. Funds (\$10,000 for this year) are restricted to the purchase of assistive technology for blind and visually impaired adults living in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. These funds make it possible to dedicate more funds for assistive technology for consumers statewide.

Katherine D. Robinson Fund

The Katherine D. Robinson fund is a gift of money to NCBVI. It was established with the provision that funds be used on programs and services for blind and visually impaired children.

NCBVI also receives numerous donations and memorials from the public. These are maintained in a cash fund and identified as eligible to match federal grants.

Participation on Councils, Boards, Advisory Committees, and Special Meetings/Conference Calls:

NCBVI staff members represent the Commission on various boards and advisory committees including:

National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB)

NCSAB is an organization of administrators of state agencies for the blind. It meets twice a year to study, deliberate, and take action on matters affecting rehabilitation and other services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. NCSAB provides a resource for the formulation and expression of the collective points of view of member agencies on all relevant issues affecting rehabilitation and other services. It also serves as an advisory body to federal agencies. NCBVI is a member agency, and Dr. Pearl Van Zandt serves as the current Treasurer and past President and regularly attends these meetings.

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) Board of Trustees

AFB is a national non-profit organization with the mission “to ensure that the millions of Americans living with vision loss enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other citizens.” The AFB Board of Trustees provides guidance and direction for AFB programs and services promoting the achievement of the overall mission. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt is a member of the AFB Board of Trustees and serves on its program committee.

National Blindness Professionals Certification Board (NBPCB)

NBPCB sets certification standards for blindness professionals including O&M instructors and braille instructors. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and Jeff Altman serve as members of the board.

Directors of Independent Agencies and Commissions of the State of Nebraska

Directors of Independent Agencies and Commissions of the State of Nebraska meet once a month to discuss issues relating to state law, policies, and procedures, and so on.

City of Lincoln - Mayor's Office - Multicultural Advisory Committee

The 11-member Multicultural Advisory Committee "...acts in an advisory capacity to the mayor and city council and is charged with the responsibility of providing advice in regards to multicultural issues within the city of Lincoln and the community. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt was just appointed to serve a 6-month term on this committee.

Nebraska Advocacy Services (NAS)

NAS, the Center for Disability Rights, Law and Advocacy, is authorized by Title V of the Rehabilitation Act to operate seven federally funded protection and advocacy (P&A) programs.

The P&A system is a nationwide network of congressionally created, legally based disability rights agencies. In Nebraska, these programs include PAIR (Protection & Advocacy for Individual Rights), PAIMI (Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness), PADD (Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities), PAAT (Protection & Advocacy for Assistive Technology), PABSS (Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security), PATBI (Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury), and PAVA (Protection & Advocacy for Voting Access). Carlos Servan serves on the NAS Board of Directors and the PAVA advisory committee. Bob Deaton serves on the PAIR advisory committee.

State of Nebraska - Office of the Secretary of State - Elections Committee

The elections committee oversees public elections within the state and offers information regarding candidates and dates of local elections. Also address issues related to voter access. Carlos Servan represents NCBVI at annual meetings of this committee.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

SILC is mandated by Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B of the Rehabilitation Act. It is charged with promoting the independent living philosophy in Nebraska. It is also responsible for the development of a 3-year State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) signed by representatives of Vocational Services (VR) Services (the state rehabilitation agency serving persons with all other disabilities other than blindness), NCBVI, and SILC. Bob Deaton represents NCBVI at quarterly meetings of the SILC.

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (NCDHH) - Interpreter Licensing Review Board

The Interpreter Licensing Review Board is charged with the enforcement of state regulations related to the licensing of qualified sign-language interpreters and the monitoring of state regulations governing the use of licensed sign-language interpreters by state agencies. The board also advises NCDHH's full board regarding relevant legislation related to sign-language interpreter licensure. Bob Deaton serves on this board.

Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program Managers

OIB Program Managers administer Title VII, Chapter 2 funds allocated to each state for services and programs for older individuals who are blind. Part of these funds had been used for an annual conference held in Washington, D.C., to provide technical assistance relevant to the administration of grant funds and opportunities for program managers to network and learn from with each other. These conferences were discontinued two years ago because of travel restrictions imposed by the states. Quarterly conference calls have replaced annual conferences. Bob Deaton is the program manager for NCBVI.

Blindness Services Networking Group

The Blindness Services Networking Group meets bi-monthly for a 90-minute telephone conference call discussion about blindness rehabilitation. The group is diverse, including agency directors, members of state rehabilitation councils and commissions, and consumers in lively discussions about how to improve agency services.

Participants are encouraged to share what works and what doesn't as well as explore new thinking. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and other Commissioners are regular participants.

Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children (NFVIC) Board of Directors

The NFVIC Board of Directors meets every three months to review requests for financial assistance for the purchase of assistive technology on behalf of blind or visually impaired children. NCBVI counselors will refer blind and visually impaired children to NFVIC for financial help in getting assistive technology. Nancy Flearl is a member of the NFVIC Board of Directors.

Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP Advisory Committee)

The ATP Advisory Committee meets quarterly to advise ATP regarding services and programs. Nancy Coffman is chairperson of this committee. Deanna Jesse serves on the ATP advisory committee subcommittee on accessible housing.

Nebraska Mobility (NeMo)

NeMo is a coalition of state agencies and organizations with the mission of increasing public transportation throughout the state of Nebraska. John Schmitt attends quarterly meetings of NeMo.

Collaboration with Other Public Service Agencies

U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA)

SSA reimburses NCBVI for funds expended on services resulting in successfully getting clients off SSDI or SSI benefits. Blind or visually impaired applicants for Social Security benefits are also routinely referred to NCBVI for services.

DOE - OSERS - Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE)

TACE is authorized by Title IV of the Rehabilitation Act. The regional office serving Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas is based in Columbia, Missouri. TACE provides technical assistance and financial support for in-service training. Most recently, TACE supported “Bridges Out of Poverty” training presented by Jodi Pfarr at the state staff meeting and training on career planning and motivational interviewing coordinated by Susan Rocker. TACE also coordinates periodic meetings of directors and field administrators of state rehabilitation agencies in Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and Bill Brown attended the last such meeting in June.

Other State Rehabilitation Agencies

Communications with other state rehabilitation agencies is a valuable source of information and resources impacting the overall operations of NCBVI.

For example, the implementation of eforce, a database management system, as well as a wealth of other ideas and innovations, came about as a direct result of a joint state staff meeting with Iowa in 2007.

An electronic mailing list is frequently used by directors and other administrators of state rehabilitation agencies as a means to share information and review issues of mutual concern.

Nebraska Department of Education (NDE)

A Transition Team of professionals from the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Education Service Unit (ESU) 3, vision resource teachers, NCBVI, NDE (State Transition Officer), the Lincoln Public School, and one parent recently completed a service protocol describing how various service agencies are to work together on behalf of blind and Visually impaired students in transition. The Transition Team has since disbanded with the completion and dissemination of this protocol.

NCBVI counselors routinely participate in individualized education program (IEP) meetings involving blind and visually impaired students in transition.

Counselors from the Lincoln district office work together with vision resource professionals and teachers at the Fremont public school and Lincoln Public Schools in the provision of training in alternative skills to blind and visually impaired children.

Vision resource professionals and educators have sat in on special programs (e.g., Winnerfest) to learn more about how NCBVI works with blind students in transition.

NDE - VR Services

NCBVI counselors consult VR Services when working with blind and visually impaired individuals with significant secondary disabilities in need of accommodations falling outside the usual scope of our expertise. Similarly, counselors from VR Services consult NCBVI when their clients experience vision loss. Staff members of both NCBVI and VR Services understand that NCBVI has priority in accepting applications for rehabilitation services from blind and visually impaired individuals, regardless of any other disabilities they may have. If a blind or visually impaired consumer with another disability should make application for services from VR Services, that person will be referred to NCBVI, no matter how minor the blindness or how significant the other disability. If NCBVI finds the applicant ineligible for services, the person is referred back to VR Services.

Project Search

Project Search is a joint initiative involving both VR Services and NCBVI. Its purpose is to increase job opportunities for people with disabilities in hospital settings. Hospitals in several communities around Nebraska are currently involved with Project Search including Grand Island, Lincoln, North Platte, and Norfolk; Columbus and Hastings will be added this fall. Interest has been expressed by one hospital in Omaha but no commitment has been made as of yet.

NCBVI supervisors and counselors have been involved in the establishment of work sites across the state and while only one NCBVI client has been placed in Lincoln as a result of this initiative, Project Search gives us an important foot in the door to future opportunities.

It should be noted that while the original intent of Project Search was to increase job opportunities for people with disabilities in hospital settings, the scope has since broadened to include work sites in other settings. Denise Johnston-Rauterkus was very involved with the planning of the first (and, so far, only) non-hospital work site in North Platte at Wal-Mart distribution center.

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) - Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)

NCBVI has provided alternative skills of blindness training for DDD staff members in vocational/residential programs. NCBVI counselors have also provided consultation in the development of individualized program plans for blind individuals served by DDD designed to maximize personal independence.

DDD is also a source of funding for long-term supported employment services for blind and visually impaired clients with developmental disabilities.

HHS - Minority Health

This committee addresses access issues to health care services facing minority populations, including persons with disabilities. Carlos Servan is a member of this committee and represents NCBVI at semiannual meetings.

Nebraska Department of Roads (DOR)

The Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 mandates a priority to blind persons to operate vending facilities on federal property. The Kennely Amendment to the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 allows for the operation of 22 vending facilities at rest stops along I-80 by 8 blind vendors under the umbrella of the Randolph-Sheppard program, in partnership with DOR.

Altogether, 15 blind vendors operating as part of Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) manage 75 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending food service in Nebraska. Not including locations along I-80, NBE vendors currently operate in 18 federal buildings, 10 state buildings, 5 local government buildings, and 13 private businesses. (Note: Some buildings may house more than one operation.)

University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) - Selleck Hall

Participants in WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a work experience program for blind and visually impaired students, stay at Selleck Hall on the UNL campus.

Located near downtown Lincoln, the dormitory is close to bus lines with access to various worksites around the city. It is also close to numerous recreational facilities.

Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)

NCBVI clients pursuing vocational training at institutions of higher education are referred to offices for students with disabilities for assistance with getting instructional materials in accessible formats and other reasonable accommodations. At Winnerfest, David Brandt, OSD at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, has talked about how important it was for high school seniors to contact and work with OSD as soon as possible after graduation.

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (NCDHH)

NCDHH administers a state program providing augmentative technology free of charge to deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech impaired Nebraskans who have difficulty using standard telephone equipment. NCDHH also administers a used hearing aid program for Sertoma (Service to Mankind) Club. NCBVI clients with hearing loss are referred to NCDHH for demonstration of equipment promoting greater independence. NCDHH coordinates the use of licensed sign language interpreters by state agencies.

Last April, Dr. Peter Seiler, Executive Director of NCDHH, spoke at the state staff meeting about how NCDHH and NCBVI can work more closely together.

Dr. Seiler also attended the June 4th bridge crossing between Omaha and Council Bluffs to commemorate Deaf-Blind Awareness Week and publicly demonstrate deaf-blind consumer solidarity.

Helen Keller National Center (HKNC)

NCBVI referred several deaf-blind individuals for alternative skills training at HKNC in Sands Point, New York. A team of HKNC instructors follow up with NCBVI and deaf-blind consumers to facilitate a smooth transition back home after training is completed in New York. Beth Jordan, HKNC Regional Representative based in Mission Point, Kansas, provides consultation to NCBVI counselors and consumers regarding deaf-blindness and HKNC services. Paige Berry (HKNC Older Blind Specialist), Beth Jordan, and Cheryl Poff jointly presented a workshop on deaf-blindness at the 2010 Standing Tall and Taking Charge Spring Conference for blind seniors in Kearney.

Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP)

ATP maintains demonstration centers around the state where consumers can learn about assistive technology designed for people with a wide range of disabilities, not just blindness. Financial counseling regarding funding sources for assistive technology is available upon request.

ATP - at4all

NCBVI received a grant from ATP about five years ago for the purchase of assistive technology for the blind and visually impaired to be posted on at4all, a web-based program providing access to assistive technology for purposes of demonstration, temporary loan, or purchase or sale. NCBVI is one of many participating agencies and organizations with assistive technology posted on the at4all website.

Client Assistance Program (CAP)

CAP is authorized by Title I of the Rehabilitation Act to help consumers with disabilities resolve problems with services received from VR Services, NCBVI, or centers for independent living. Victoria Rasmussen represents CAP at NCBVI management team meetings, supervisors meetings, and state staff meetings. Ms. Rasmussen also serves on NCBVI's placement committee, helping to ensure that emphasis on quality employment outcomes for clients is maintained.

Several NCBVI counselors and supervisors are involved with local Workforce Investment boards and Chambers of Commerce, establishing valuable connections to potential employers. In addition to being a voting member of the Greater Nebraska Workforce Investment Board (GNWIP), Denise Johnston-Rauterkus is the chairperson of the Youth Council, a committee within the GNWIP.

The Training Center in Lincoln partners with many entities in the course of the training provided to blind students, particularly as that training relates to community usage. A partial list of collaborating entities includes Sheldon Art Gallery, National Homestead Museum, Community Action Program, Christian Records, Privet Fishing Club, and Southeast Community College (student participation in GED classes).

The Training Center has also provided training for blindness professionals from other states.

Collaboration with Professional and Non-Profit Organizations:

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)

The AFB offers a wide range of resources and programs for blind agencies and professionals and blind and visually impaired consumers. Of particular interest are links to Career Connect and Senior Site on the AFB website.

Hadley School for the Blind

The Hadley School for the Blind offers a wide range of correspondence and online courses for blind consumers. NCBVI clients have taken courses towards obtaining their GED. This is also a resource for in-service training of interest to blindness professionals.

Veterans Administration (VA)

Many blinded veterans choose training provided by NCBVI over that available from the training program at the Chicago Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC). The VA will pay for equipment on behalf of veterans who receive training from NCBVI. The Lincoln VAMC is also a site for Nebraska Business Enterprise.

Sheltered workshops, supported Employment providers, and residential programs for people with developmental disabilities

Human service professionals working with blind and visually impaired persons with developmental disabilities frequently consult NCBVI counselors about blindness and how best to accommodate problems caused by blindness in work or residential settings. These include institutions such as Beatrice State Developmental Center, Nid-Nebraska Individual Services, Goodwill Industries, Martin Luther Homes, Community Alternatives of Nebraska, Quality Living, ServiceLinc, Employment Works, and so on.

Goodwill Industries has worked with NCBVI in setting up community-based work assessment to determine interest and aptitude for work in such areas as retail sales, production, custodial services, and lawn maintenance. Goodwill Industries has also assisted with job development on behalf of specific individuals.

Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

These include the League of Human Dignity, the Greater Nebraska Center for Independent Living, and PILS. Staff members working for these institutions have worked with NCBVI on barrier removal and alternatives for individuals with multiple disabilities exceeding our expertise.

Lions Club

Lions Club chapters across Nebraska have provided or shared the cost of equipment for clients in the IL track. They have also provided eye examinations and glasses to referrals interested only in the acquisition of new glasses. Lions clubs have also assisted individuals with the acquisition of hearing aids.

Nebraska Prevent Blindness

This is another resource to individuals primarily interested only in obtaining free eye examinations and glasses.

National Eye Care Project

The National Eye Care Project is a source of free eye care and surgery for individuals 65 years of age and older who meet the income guidelines. On occasion, some ophthalmologists will provide pro bono eye care and cataract surgery to indigent consumers.

Friends of the Commission

Friends of the Commission is a private, not-for-profit organization of consumers and interested stakeholders dedicated to the financial support of NCBVI and its mission. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt serves in an ex officio capacity and attends quarterly meetings to consider fund raising strategies and requests for financial assistance with agency programs and activities.

Friends of the Commission recently awarded funds for the purchase of t-shirts for participants in summer youth programs proclaiming the importance of independence for the blind.

Collaboration with the Private Sector:

The Leadership Center

The Leadership Center in Aurora has hosted Winnerfest, a spring and fall retreat for blind and visually impaired teenagers, for more than 10 years. Staff members at The Leadership Center have been especially helpful with the arrangements and set up for program activities on numerous occasions.

Camp Woodman of the World

This year, Project Independence will take place at Camp Woodman of the World in Nebraska City. The camp offers a wide range of outdoor recreational activities and places to explore locally. The facilities and meals there are offered to NCBVI at no charge.

Employers

Employers play an active role in employment workshops designed to bring blind and visually impaired job seekers and prospective employers together. Employers are encouraged to tour the Training Center in Lincoln to learn more about blindness and what blind people have to offer on the job.

NCBVI counselors and Technology Specialists also offer on-site assessments and consultation regarding reasonable accommodations for blind employees.

Four employers are noted here because of their efforts to recruit blind and visually impaired employees. These are Outlook Nebraska, Inc., the Hyatt Reservation Center, and the Marriott Reservation Center in Omaha and Apogee in Columbus.

Vendors

Vendors of assistive technology for blind and visually impaired consumers frequently visit NCBVI offices throughout the state to demonstrate their product line and answer questions counselors and consumers may have. Vendors include accessibility.net, Magnification Resources, Freedom Scientific, HumanWare, and Eschenbach Optik of America.

Referrals of blind and visually impaired persons to NCBVI for services come from many sources. Without naming specific referral sources, these can be categorized as educational institutions (K-12), institutions of higher education, eye care professionals, physicians or other medical personnel, VR Services, welfare agency (state or local), community rehabilitation programs, Social Security Administration (Disability Determination Service unit or local), one-stop employment/training centers, senior centers, faith-based organizations, centers for independent living, consumer organizations, and other referral sources not falling into convenient categories such as Talking Book and Braille Services (TBBS) and Radio Talking Book (RTB). These categories are adapted from those established by RSA for purposes of data collection at the time application is made for services.

NCBVI staff members receive electronic mailing lists and newsletters (too many to list here) covering a wide range of information and resources of interest to blindness professionals and consumers such as in-service training events, pending consumer conventions and programs, job opportunities for the blind, assistive technology, advances in medical research, and other areas of general interest.

Collaboration with Consumer organizations:

ACBN and NFBN are often invited to participate in programs and activities such as WAGES and employment workshops. Both organizations had a table in the exhibit hall at the 2010 Standing Tall and Taking Charge spring conference for blind seniors. Both organizations have also provided information about blind consumer organizations to students in the Training Center.

NCBVI staff members have also addressed general sessions at state conventions of ACBN and NFBN. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt uses state conventions as opportunities to garner public comment about the overall operation of NCBVI. Students and staff members of the Training Center regularly attend state conventions of both organizations.

NCBVI staff members and clients attend national conventions of the ACB and NFB. National conventions provide excellent opportunities for attendees to learn more about blindness, network with others, and learn about a wide range of resources. Dr. Pearl Van Zandt routinely attends national conventions of both consumer organizations.

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and other NCBVI staff members also attend annual legislative breakfasts at the State Office Building in Lincoln. Members of both organizations have also provided testimony at public hearings of the Appropriations Committee in support of NCBVI services and programs.

NCBVI also assisted with workshops coordinated by the Nebraska Association of Blind Students.

American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB)

The 2011 AADB Symposium will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio. This event offers a rare opportunity for deaf-blind consumers to come together and learn from each other. Once an annual event, these symposiums are scheduled as available funds allow. The last one was held in 2008. Elaine Kavulak will attend the symposium this year.

Visually Impaired Peer Support (VIPS)

Although VIPS no longer receives grant funds from NCBVI for spring conferences, several local chapters continue to call NCBVI counselors for help with program planning and support. VIPS also continues to be a valued source of referrals.

Public Relations:

Kent Taylor Productions

Kent Taylor Productions produced “The Life You Choose,” often referred to as the “Center video.” At present, Kent Taylor Productions is at work on public service announcements promoting NCBVI services and programs.

Kent Taylor Productions also produced “Pathways to Independence,” a 7-part series highlighting the alternative skills of blindness. Primarily produced for the purpose of complementing skills instruction in the field, these videos are proving an excellent public relations tool. The series can be found on the NCBVI website and the possibility of broadcasting the series on public television is currently being investigated. State rehabilitation agencies in Alabama and Hawaii have contacted NCBVI for copies of the series. Deanna Jesse was very involved in the production of “Pathways to Independence.”

Joint Agency Meeting (JAM) and Transition Fair

JAM and Transition Fair is a public forum held once a year and coordinated by PILS and held at different locations in the panhandle. This year, a panel consisting of representatives of agencies including NCBVI, VR Services, NCDHH, ATP, League of Human Dignity, HHS, and DDS provided information and answers questions from the public regarding services available to consumers with disabilities. Bob Deaton and Josie Rodriguez represented NCBVI at the meeting in Gering, Nebraska.

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt regularly attends and addresses annual meetings and banquets of organizations such as Nebraska Association of the Blind (NAB), Omaha Association of the Blind (OAB), and Blind Veterans Association (BLA). NAB is an association primarily of blind graduates of the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired. OAB is an organization of blind consumers from the greater Omaha metropolitan area. BLA is an association of blind veterans.

NCBVI staff members frequently attend health fairs and distribute information regarding NCBVI services and programs. Recent events include the Richardson County Health Fair, the Spring Caretaker event at Mahoney State Park, and the Elder Care event held on the campus of Metro Community College in Omaha.

Field counselors across the state make a concerted effort to establish ongoing relationships with eye care professionals. For the past ten years or so, NCBVI has also maintained a booth at the annual conference of the Nebraska Optometric Association.

Members of the public routinely tour the Training Center in Lincoln. Special efforts are made to schedule tours for potential employers of the blind, state legislators, and other state officials.

Representatives of other agencies and organization are frequently invited to staff meetings at the local, district, and state levels to present information relevant to blind and visually impaired consumers.

Events coordinated by NCBVI are often covered by local newspapers and television stations.

Schools and other service agencies and organizations frequently ask NCBVI counselors to present information about blindness and services available to blind people

Information about NCBVI services and other agencies and organizations is routinely given to members of the public who walk into any of the six field offices operated by NCBVI.

Information and Referral:

NCBVI counselors routinely provide information to new referrals about services and programs of interest to blind and visually impaired people provided by other agencies and organizations and assist with the application process if needed. These services and programs include:

Talking Book and Braille Services

Radio Talking Book

Give-A-Lift and Share-A-Fare (subsidized taxi coupon programs in Omaha and Lincoln)

Aurora Ministries (provides audio recordings of the Bible)

Waiver of charges for Telephone directory assistance

Once an individual has been accepted for NCBVI services, referrals may be made to a wide range of programs and services, particularly as such referrals promote the achievement of vocational rehabilitation/independent living goals specified on individualized service plans (i.e., scholarships and comparable benefits, vocational training, supported employment services,

SSDI/SSI, Medicaid/Medicare benefits, low vision evaluations, mental health counseling, other medical services, low-income housing, welfare programs).