

January 5, 2012

The Honorable Dave Heineman
Governor of the State of Nebraska
State Capitol, Second Floor
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

Dear Governor Heineman:

In compliance with Statute 71-8316 of 2000, the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Commission) herewith transmits its annual report for the year ending December 31, 2011.

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

The Commission has completed its Federal Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2011, and, also operates under the State Fiscal Year for budgeting, accounting and related matters.

The Commission is governed by a Board of Commissioners (Board), which met throughout the year, dealing with several issues and learning more about the services that the Commission provides. The Board met in February, May, August, and November. During these meetings information about the programs was provided to the Board, including the State Plan, Evaluation of the Executive Director and overall morale of commission employees, Partnerships with other Agencies, and the Center Apartment Resource Position and the Residential Component to Center Training. The Board also established some policies and gave advice for some programs and procedures. The Board will continue to meet at least quarterly and work to accomplish the Mission of the Commission.

The Commission web site (<http://www.ncbvi.ne.gov/>) provides information regarding its programs, as well as links to consumer organizations and information regarding blindness and blindness issues. As Executive Director, I attend statewide and local chapter meetings of consumer organizations to build a strong partnership, by both listening to concerns and explain to consumers the reasons of why the agency takes a certain direction. I also continue to use email and website postings to communicate information; keeping the Board, leaders of consumer organizations, and staff apprised of changes and developments of the Commission.

Governor Dave Heineman
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The Commission remains deeply committed to its goal of assisting blind persons to become fully self-supporting, tax paying members of society. This report delineates the ways in which we realize this goal.

Respectfully,

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

Attachments

cc: NCBVI Commission Board

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2011



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NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2011

I INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (The Commission) is the State rehabilitation agency which mission is “Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities and building belief in the blind”. The Commission provides a variety of comprehensive services enabling blind people to become fully participating, contributing members of society. Blind people lead normal lives, work in a wide range of jobs, have families, raise children, and participate in community activities. However, the real challenge is still to change society’s misconceptions about the capability of the blind. The Commission works on this by providing comprehensive training to our consumers about their own potential, and also by educating their family members and the general public, especially businesses, about the ability of the blind to be fully integrated into the social and economic mainstream. The following programs and services provide the means by which blind persons can obtain, regain or retain a productive role in society:

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Technology
- Independent Living-Older Blind
- Deaf-Blind
- Business Enterprise
- Digital Voice Newspaper Delivery System (NFB-NEWSLINE®)

The Commission utilizes three types of surveys to quantify client satisfaction and to seek input for improvement. These surveys are completed at different times. The Rehabilitation Track Survey and the Independent Living Survey are completed at least four months after case closure. To get a better feedback from our VR clients, a more comprehensive survey instrument is conducted over the phone. The Nebraska Center Survey is conducted also over the phone, three months after training is completed. Another form of phone survey is done after some of the programs, such as transition programs and Employment Conference. The last form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, which are held four times a year with the Board of Commissioners and also two more times at State conventions of consumer organizations.

The Enrichment Foundation grant from last year provided assistance to older blind clients in the Omaha area (PILBO – Providing Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha). The new grant which will start in January 2012, will help the older blind in the Omaha area. During our ninth Federal Fiscal Year, the Commission was able to obtain its full federal-funding match. We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds.

II
FINANCIAL REPORT

Expenditures July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011

1. Basic Support:	
A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$ 3,137,939
B. Aid	\$ 655,123
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$ 268,260
B. Aid	\$ 24,029
3. Supported Employment	
A. Operations	\$ 0
B. Aid	\$ 46,395
4. Independent Living Part B	
A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$ 23,141
B. Aid	\$ 7,708
5. In-Service Training Grant	
A. Operations (only)	\$ 26,813
6. Social Security Reimbursement	
A. Operations (Most of which are spent on direct services)	\$ 243,372
B. Aid	\$ 27,759
7. PILBO	
A. Operations	\$ 2,250
B. Aid	\$ 9,585
8. Senior Blind	\$ 126,853
9. Program Income	\$ 13,471

III VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

The purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is to prepare blind/visually impaired individuals to enter, retain or advance in a full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market. In rehabilitating such individuals, the Commission provides training and placement in quality jobs that are appropriate to each individual's capabilities, abilities, potentials, interest, resources, and informed choice. Some of the services that can be provided are: learning positive attitudes about blindness, training in the skills of blindness, self advocacy, blindness information to family and friends, vocational education, counseling and guidance to individuals and their family members, assistance on higher education, job training, job development, job placement and adaptive technology services. During federal fiscal year 2010/2011, 532 Nebraskans received services in all statuses; of which 59 consumers were competitively employed in a variety of jobs as well as 4 consumers achieving their goal of independent homemaker. In addition, this year our staff worked with 175 multi-handicapped individuals who also happen to be blind and 185 Transition age clients ages 14-26. The Commission successfully achieved levels required by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Commission worked diligently with businesses and public entities to educate them about the potential of the blind. For instance, this year the commission invited businesses to a state-wide employment conference sponsored by our agency and also provided Power-Point presentations informing them of reasonable accommodations that will not lower their expectations of productivity. Consumers were placed in a variety of jobs, including: Accounting Clerk, Barrier Removal Program for Independent Living, Bookkeeper, Braille Instructor, Business Management, Cafeteria and Institution Cook, Cafeteria Worker, Cashier, Child Care Teacher, Child Care Worker, Corrections Officer, Customer Service Representative, Diesel Mechanic, Dietary Aide, Etcher and Engraver, Farmworkers, Farm and Ranch Animals, General Counseling, Grocery Clerk, Home Health Aide, Housekeeper, Insurance Sales Agent, Jewelry Designer - Self Employed, Lawyer, Legal Support Workers, Marketing Manager, Marriage and Family Therapist, Massage Therapist, Medical Transcriptionist, Mental Health Counselor, Network Manager, Nurse, Nursing Aid, Packaging & Filling Machine Operator, Phone Interviewer, Placement Specialist, Probation and Parole Officer, Randolph Sheppard Vendor, Real Estate Broker, Rehabilitation Specialist, Reporter/Correspondent, Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks, Retail Salesperson, School Counselor, Shipping, Receiving, and Traffic Clerks, Supervisor/Manager of Retail Sales Workers, Teacher, Telemarketer, Upholstery Cleaner, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Staff development continues as an important facet of improving the quality of services to our consumers. The entire staff continues to receive training on counseling skills, job development, job placement, dealing with other mental and physical disabilities, and customer services which enables them to provide good services to our clients and stakeholders. Our staff also receives ongoing training on multi-handicapped issues, as individuals in this population group continue to increase. The Commission emphasizes quality competitive employment, not just the first available job, but full-time jobs that will provide consumers good wages, health insurance and

the potential for upward mobility. As a result, the clients placed in jobs will no longer need to receive social security benefits or welfare.

Counseling and guidance are also available to families who want to better understand blindness and to support family members who are blind or visually impaired in their pursuit of personal and vocational goals. Furthermore, the Commission promotes a positive understanding to the general public of blindness and the abilities of people who are blind. We know that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can be fully integrated into the social and economic mainstream. This philosophy is disseminated through educational programs designed to reach businesses/employers, educators, health care professionals, human services agencies, and other individuals and organizations that come into contact with the blind.

New curriculum training has been implemented to enhance clients' job-seeking skills. Each of the three districts have clients come for three-day sessions to be trained in the following: alternative techniques of blindness: interviewing skills, social skills, resume writing, net working, job hunting, problem solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness, among others.

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

Transition services were funded by a federal grant through RSA from October 2000 through September 2005. Since then we have funded the programs with some help from the private sector and partnership with workforce youth councils. In the 2010 calendar year we used ARRA funds and some private donations to conduct transition from school to work services.

Employment experiences and independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up. The Transition Program is focused on creating and supporting these opportunities across the state. The two Deputy Directors coordinate the transition services together with field staff. They work to develop positive relationships with schools, families, and employers in their communities. Work opportunities and other special programs for transition students are designed to provide social skills, work ethics, and a work history, all of which contribute significantly to eventual success in the workplace as adults.

This past summer, the WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) Program, held in Lincoln for six weeks, provided work experiences for twelve Nebraska students. During the first few days of the program, students received intensive orientation and mobility instruction to become familiar with the UNL campus where they were housed and the near downtown area. They were then able to travel to and from work independently each day. Throughout the program, students increased their self-esteem by participating in weekly seminars involving discussions regarding work ethics and blindness issues. They were exposed to adult blind role models who hold competitive jobs. These role models shared their lives and work experiences and answered the students' questions. The WAGES coordinator was in constant contact with the

employers during the duration of the program to insure the success of the students in the work place. The staff also worked to educate employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of individuals who are blind. In addition, WAGES participants had challenging activities such as hiking, horseback riding, obstacle course, high ropes, and wall climbing, among others, which were geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life.

The jobs students held included: helper at the UNL Selleck cafeteria, worker at the Humane Society, worker at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Records Management, staff assistant with the Assistive Technology Partnership, helpers at Saint Elisabeth Hospital, data entry staff at the Saint Elisabeth Hospital, data entry helper with the Mexican American Commission, helper at the Lazer Quest, assistant at the State Capitol Tour Division, helper at the Malone Community Center, and helper at the Family Service day-care.

Two other programs are “Winnerfest” and Project Independence (PI). “Winnerfest” is designed for blind teenagers from across the state to participate in two semi-annual retreats. We had fourteen and eight students participating during the two sessions, respectively. Activities were focused on technology and job seeking skills and some of the issues discussed were the importance of mastering the skills of blindness, social skills, advocacy skills, personal achievement, goal setting, adaptive equipment, communication and other life skills. One of the most important aspects of these sessions was that the participants were exposed to successful blind role models. PI is a one week program designed for younger children, ages 7 to 15 where they are introduced to social skills and to work using blindness alternative techniques. This year, the seven blind and visually impaired youngsters participated in different activities including cooking, cleaning, and social skills.

The Nebraska Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired is a collaborative effort among the Commission, the Department of Education, school districts, the Nebraska Center for Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, the Nebraska Department of Education Deaf-Blind Project, consumer organizations and other entities. The primary purpose is to share information with each other, advise, seek to improve relations and services, and promote an understanding of the issues and critical needs of the students involved in the education and transition process. During the 2010 calendar year the team worked on a protocol which is helping to build partnerships between the transition stakeholders in the state. The document has been finalized and is being disseminated across the state to educational entities, early child hood agencies, consumers, and parents. The transition team provided training to Commission staff and teachers from the public schools during the 2010 calendar year.

The Commission staff continues to be active in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln, Lancaster County and Greater Nebraska.

IV TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

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

For instance, last year, consultations were also provided to Apogee call center, the Social Security Administration, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, Saint Francis Hospital in Grand Island, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Nebraska Library Commission, Bryan-LGH West, Saint Elizabeth Hospital, Hillis 66, West Corporation, Qwest Customer Service Center, Lancaster County, Lincoln Workforce Development, Mexican American Commission, Medigraphix, Calvary Methodist Church, University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Chadron State College, Southeast Community College, Metro Community College, Hamilton College, Doane College, Iowa Western Community College, Influent, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nebraska Office of the CIO, US Info, ConAgra Food, the Hyatt Hotel reservation center in Omaha, Goodwill Industries of Omaha and Grand Island, Red Cross, Cabela's, Frank House in Kearney, Nebraska Department of Labor, Lincoln Public Schools, Omaha public schools, Minden High School, North Platte Public Schools, Alliance Public Schools, Region 1 Office of Human Development in Sidney, Grand Island public schools, Scottsbluff High School, and JRW Sales Inc., among others. The technology program also provides loaner equipment to consumers and employers.

Consultations were provided to St. Francis Medical Center in Grand Island, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership, Doane College, Central Community College in Hastings, Western Nebraska Community College, Chadron State College, Bridgeport Public Schools, North Platte High School, Ainsworth High School, Kearney High School, Grand Island High School, Department of Health and Human Services, Thedford Public Library, Starship Enterprises.

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

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

The focus continues to be on demonstrating speech systems for Windows 2000, XP, Vista, and now exploring Windows 7. Windows-based applications with speech and magnification are taught. Voice recognition systems are also valuable for consumers who cannot physically use a keyboard. Now that iOS (iPad/iPhone) and Mac operating systems are accessible through built-in screen reading and magnification technology, technology specialists have learned to use and teach this technology, as well.

The Commission's technology specialists are continuously researching in order to keep up with changes in technology and to have it available to consumers, schools and employers.

V THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the Blind is a six to nine month comprehensive program which provides highly effective pre-vocational rehabilitation training to blind individuals. The training provided is based on the techniques utilized by highly successful blind persons, and is designed to build confidence. This includes training in the alternative skills of blindness, such as Braille, communications, technology, cane travel, basic wood-working and home repair, home management, apartment living, philosophical counseling, and vocational development and placement. On average, 92% of individuals graduating from the Nebraska Center for the blind, achieve their vocational goals, and the majority of these graduates obtain and maintain competitive employment.

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

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

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

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

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

We also initiate and encourage a variety of classroom based activities as well as off-site activities. Such activities have included pumpkin carving, the preparation of a full Thanksgiving meal at the Center, and toy collecting project for Salvation Army and Head start. Other experiences include non-visual tours of museums, participating in a walkathon, ringing bells for Salvation Army, trips to the local water park, attending state consumer conventions, and community service and other volunteer efforts.

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

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

The Center also engages in ongoing programs of public education to promote the integration of blind persons into jobs, home and community. The Center invites individuals and groups to come tour the facility to view the various features of Center training and promote the potential of blind persons. Visitors have included students from public and private schools and colleges, vision teachers from Nebraska public schools, government officials, personnel from other governmental agencies, and businesses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

During this calendar year, the Center provided intensive training to 28 clients. Additionally, six new Commission staff members participated in the Staff Training Program (this includes the 1 Summer temporary employee). The Center also conducted 82 tours with a total of 126 individuals who were provided direct education regarding blindness from NCBVI staff. The Center continues to assist the Business Enterprise Program staff in evaluating prospective vendors.

VI INDEPENDENT LIVING-OLDER BLIND PROGRAM

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

During the 2011 Federal fiscal year, there were a total of 841 consumers served through the IL/OB programs. 672 individuals were 55 and over (OB program) while 169 were under 55, of which 39 were under 14 years of age, and in the IL program.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired receive training in the alternative skills needed to pursue personal and vocational goals. Instruction typically begins in the home, focusing on areas of cane travel, Braille, and homemaking. Those needing more intensive instruction often move on to training in the Center.

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

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

During calendar year 2010, the Commission launched a new web-based case management system which allows counselors do the IL paperwork from the clients' houses or where ever they

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

New curriculum training has been implemented to enhance clients' home living skills. Clients will come for three-day sessions, and during four sessions be trained in alternative techniques as they develop their skills in a setting away from home. Training during this program is conducted using sleep shades. Sessions include: cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities (such as shopping, golfing, fishing, and visiting museums) are geared to developing skills and confidence for all aspects of life.

Because ARRA funds were also available to this program, the Commission planned and implemented a state-wide conference for older blind Nebraskans, which took place in Kearney on May 5 and 6. We also used ARRA funds to create professional modules on DVD for teaching alternative techniques and blindness skills. This module will be available to older clients and their families to learn and practice the alternative techniques of blindness, due to the fact that we have limited time to visit clients at their homes. This module will also be available to other professionals in the blindness field both in Nebraska and around the country.

VII DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM

Prior to setting up the Deaf-Blind Program, services to deaf-blind consumers in the state had been limited by the constraints of time available to individual staff members who had other duties. In 2002, the program initiated a process for identifying the deaf-blind population. To date, the number of individuals identified for the Helen Keller National Center Deaf-Blind registry has increased to 356, of which 208 are females and 148 are males. In 2011, the Deaf-Blind Program provided services to deaf-blind consumers. This includes services to enable individuals who are deaf-blind to live full and productive lives with dignity and self-respect. This program strives to assist individuals who are deaf-blind to achieve full participation within their home communities through awareness, use of American Sign Language, other alternative forms of communication, and utilization of available resources.

The Deaf-Blind Program works in partnership with Nebraska agencies serving consumers who are deaf-blind as well as staff and consumers of the Commission. This program provides services and assists individuals who are deaf-blind to obtain other services related to all aspects of employment, education, and independent living. The program staff is responsible for planning and scheduling duties in a manner conducive to smooth transition for consumers, as well as efficient use of time and effort.

Other services provided include: coordination and facilitation of two support group for consumers who are deaf-blind; mentoring, demonstration and assessment of the appropriateness of augmentative technology for consumers who are deaf-blind; development of inter-agency agreements or procedures to facilitate the coordination of services to individuals who are deaf-blind; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for the purpose of increasing professional awareness, community awareness, and deaf-blind advocacy; development, coordination, and implementation of training programs focusing on deaf-blindness for interpreters working for and through the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH); and locating resources and materials for Commission staff and other agencies serving or housing consumers who are deaf-blind.

The Deaf-Blind Program will continue to identify and develop resources and services that will help eliminate the service gaps to consumers who experience the combination of deafness and blindness.

VIII **NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND**

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska over ten years ago with the help of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and continues to grow. This program is a phone-based system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers, and national magazines. There is a total of six Nebraskan newspapers, plus another six national papers, 5 Spanish publications, 306 newspapers across the country and 35 magazines which are accessible by touch-tone telephone. Also available are store circulars TV and job listings. This also enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-Newsline® when traveling throughout the United States.

Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses first a paper or a magazine, then the category within the paper, such as national, state, or local news, sports, area events and editorial opinions. The listener immediately hears the first story of that category. They can then skip to the next story or column, replay it, jump ahead or go back in 10 second increments, adjust the volume, choose a different voice, or exit the category and choose another by pressing a single digit. Listener options also include the ability to slow down or speed up the rate of speech, a special time check key and a pause control that allows the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, the availability to spell a word, go forward or backward by paragraphs, go forward or backward by sentences, and/or to search for a subject throughout the paper by a chosen word. Articles can even be emailed to subscribers with a single key stroke.

The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 1,564 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is available to qualified readers free of charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all 93 counties. Emailing and the internet are the most popular forms of communication today. NFB-Newsline® recognizes this and is constantly thinking of new ways to keep up to date with this fast paced world. NFB-Newsline® online was created for subscribers to browse through papers and have more access to current events.

Who Can Benefit? Anyone who cannot read conventional newsprint could qualify for this free service. Many **seniors** have lost enough vision that reading the daily newspaper is no longer possible. They can enjoy being able once again to participate actively in community affairs. Furthermore, **blind children** are now able to research their own civics assignments and do their homework independently. Additionally, blind persons preparing for jobs in the year 2011 and beyond cannot afford to ignore the idea of newspaper availability. NFB-Newsline® has made it possible for hundreds of blind and print-impaired Nebraskans to address this compelling need, thus affording them the opportunity to become even more independent and productive. NFB-Newsline® is the only service that makes so much information available to these eligible people.

NFB-Newsline® has a speech system based on Eloquence sound which is similar to a human voice and is being used by most blind people in the country. NFB-Newsline® has indeed contributed to a more literate blind population and the ability to better understand and master the printed word through better access to daily newspapers and a variety of magazines.

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind proudly continues to lead the way as it forges ahead in its quest to take its rightful place on the information "super highway." In the same way the Internet has created a global village, NFB-Newsline® has opened a whole new world to its users by enabling them to achieve vocational, economic and social equality to help meet the challenges of today and the hopes and dreams of tomorrow.

IX REFERRAL SERVICES

Commission staff members provide ongoing referral services to consumers. There are also a variety of services available to consumers that the agency does not provide in a direct manner. Some of those services are:

Nebraska Visually Impaired Peer Support (VIPS): This network of support groups, located throughout the state, offers an environment where individuals who are visually impaired can meet, learn from each other, and cope more effectively with blindness. Local peer groups usually meet monthly at accessible, convenient locations. Transportation is provided when possible. The Nebraska VIPS is a statewide organization developed by blind persons interested in helping each other while helping themselves.

The goals of VIPS are: To create and maintain a network of mutual support and peer counseling groups for persons who experience vision loss; to inform and educate blind and visually impaired Nebraskans about available services and resources; and to educate the public and public officials about the circumstances of aging and blindness.

Nebraska Talking Book and Braille Services is the State Library Service for the Blind and Reading Impaired. Commission staff assists consumers in completing applications and teaching consumers how to use the service and the equipment.

Consumer controlled organizations allow blind people to be exposed to other blind people in order to give them invigoration and encouragement, in addition to our services. Our counselors continue to refer clients to these consumer organizations in the state; which are the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska and the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska. Long after the rehabilitation experience is over, mentoring will continue giving them that extra support. When a person becomes blind or even grows up blind, his or her first need is to associate with other blind people. The individual initially needs to know what is possible to do as a blind person. The family won't likely know, nor will his or her community. So first, blind people need to have exposure to other blind people, not just for the encouragement from those who have done remarkable things, but also to gain a new perspective on how societal attitudes about blindness play out.

Radio Talking Book Network (RTBN) is a statewide, closed circuit, radio reading service for those individuals who have disabilities, visual or physical, which prevent them from reading printed material. Special receivers or televisions with the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) feature are required to hear the broadcasts of RTBN. Although there are books available for the visually impaired, including the Talking Book Program of the Library of Congress, there is still a daily informational void that visually handicapped people experience. RTBN makes it possible for people to stay in touch with their community and what is going on around them. Our counselors help consumers complete applications for RTBN services and teach consumers to use the equipment.

INFORMATION REGARDING ACTIVITIES AND EXPENDITURES OF THE VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM

Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE)

The NBE provides individuals who are legally blind the opportunity to manage their own small businesses in vending facilities located within Federal, State, and other vending routes. Commission support to NBE vendors across the state includes: two full-time and one part-time staff members, equipment, supplies, and initial stock as well as training and assistance in skill areas essential for business management, and constant follow-up.

Since its creation by the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, the NBE Program has provided competitive employment opportunities for blind individuals served by the Commission. The NBE purpose is also to demonstrate to the general public the abilities of the blind, thereby helping to improve attitudes regarding the hiring of blind persons.

There are 16 licensed vendors, who manage 77 sites and run two cafeterias and maintain more than 500 machines in Federal, State and local buildings, and rest areas on the interstate across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on 3 new vending opportunities. For federal fiscal year 2011, net profit to the vendors was \$268,957.

In 2011 there were 77 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending food service in Nebraska that are under Business Enterprises. The locations of the NBE vending facilities were as follows.

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

Prepared food service in the Lower Level of the State Office Building at 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
GSA, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
GSA, West Second Street, Grand Island
Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island
Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
Law Enforcement School, Grand Island
National Guard Armory, North Platte
Nebraska Western Community College, Sidney
22 different rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Kimble on Interstate 80
Hall County Buildings (3)
Bulk Vending, State Office Building
220 S. 17th Street, Lincoln, NE
UPS Distribution Center, Sidney
Rail Car Repair Center, Sidney
Body Shop, Kearney
Shizuki Plant, Ogallala
Ferber Recycling Shop, Grand Island
Kidney Dialysis Center, Kearney
Lincoln Census Bureau
Omaha Census Bureau
Allied Tire Service
Grand Island Parks and Recreation
Wilson's Truck Repair
DuVal Diesel Service
Grease Monkey, North Platte
Platte Butch's Auto
Gibbon Nursing Home
Camp Ashland Military cafeteria

The program continues to grow by developing more vending routes across the state, with the latest efforts being in Ashland, North Platte, Lincoln, and Omaha.

All prospective vendors are assessed to determine what kind of skills they need to acquire, such as basic math, basic accounting, writing, techniques of blindness, and customer service.

Business skills are developed by taking courses at Nebraska's Community Colleges relating to such areas as human relations, supervision, business practices, basic accounting, tax law, marketing costs and inventory control.

The NBE Vendors Committee met in March, June, September, and December. Three blind managers and 4 NBE staff members attended a national conference sponsored by RSA and three training sessions were provided to three blind candidates in Nebraska.

NBE EXPENDITURES

<u>Federal</u>	<u>Set Aside</u>	<u>Other</u>
\$173,080	\$53,303	None

It is estimated that the amounts will be similar for 2012.

The Commission's Business Enterprises, developed from Federal legislation known as the Randolph-Sheppard Act, continues to increase employment opportunities of existing managers and trainees throughout the state.