

Quarterly Report

In lieu of Minutes for February Meeting

Cancelled due to Winter Storm

Report from Commissioners

Julie Johnson, Chairperson's report:

Over the past few months I have continued to keep up to date on events at NCBVI through email correspondence and telephone contact. The visit from RSA was at the forefront as NCBI prepared for and then hosted RSA representatives for a week in January. I reviewed a large amount of materials provided by Dr. Van Zandt in preparation for this visit and the scheduled RSA focus topic that was to have taken place in February. I also participated in the conference call with RSA with the other Commissioners.

I think the RSA phone conference conversation was productive for everyone. The RSA representatives asked a lot of very good questions. I believe they took away a much clearer understanding of the role of the Board of Commissioners. We also discussed transition program client closures. I think this is an area that will require further discussion and exploration.

As I have previously stated, I will be attending and speaking at the April ACBN state convention. I will be requesting reimbursement of these expenses at the May meeting. February, March and April will also include: exit conference with RSA, my legislative confirmation hearing, a visit to the Nebraska Center for the Blind and attendance at the state staff meeting.

Jim Jirak, Vice Chairman:

Since my brief report last November, I haven't done much. However, I did forget to mention that while at the Center during my three day stay, I did attend the retirement/farewell party for Candy Larson.

I stated that the board of commissioners thanked her for her service and encouraged her to enjoy retirement.

I also took part on the RSA call January 23.

Mike Hansen, Executive Secretary:

I have a few comments regarding the RSA conference call. One of the areas that we scored lower in was job placement. After hearing this I asked the RSA representatives if our closing of client cases that are placed at Outlook Nebraska as "unsuccessful" impacted these statistics. At the time they could not answer, but said that they would look into it. I also asked if our recidivism rate was taken into account when determining this score. Other agencies may have a higher placement count but that doesn't mean as much if a single client is the recipient of 2 or 3 of those job placements.

To briefly add to Nancy's comment about the Boards involvement in the day to day activities of the Commission. I would say that it is my understanding that when we were a new commission that the Board did have a greater role in the day to day processes then it does today. It is also my understanding that they found after a period of time that this didn't work so well and eventually changed the way that they operated to the model that we use today. With that said I wouldn't be opposed to reaching out to some of the other State Commissions for the Blind around the country to get a better understanding of how they operate.

Some of the other things that I have been spending my time on over the last few months include: applying for reappointment to the Board and seeking out other blindness support groups in Lincoln. I have of course known about VIPS but I have made an effort to contact a few of the groups here to learn more about them. I have also started to find some additional groups in my local area that I haven't been aware of in the past.

From Nancy Oltman, Commissioner:

The first thing that comes to mind for me is the fact that the RSA still wishes the Commission Board to be involved in the day to day activity of the Commission.

As I am remembering from other conference calls in the past, before any of the current Commissioners besides myself and possibly Darrell, were on the Board; this was an area which they truly felt we should be involved. This time, they weren't quite as insistent as in the past, but it was still an issue for them. I do believe that one of the things they were impressed with was our packet for new Commissioners. I got the impression this is something new for them.

In regard to the Blind Networking conference call, this call, at least to me, was one of the more productive conference calls we have had. It had been announced that the RSA Commissioner was to join us on the call for questions. However, due to her husband's health and her own plans to resign from her position, she did not feel it was appropriate to do so. So I am not sure if this was the reason or not, but we had one of the biggest groups ever calling in to join us.

Several items were discussed and some help given. First, we learned that Georgia's Commission might be going back under the big umbrella of the RSA. The gentleman from Georgia was asking for advice. Many ideas were given to him, including getting the consumer groups fully involved with contacting the state legislature. There was a discussion about the Commission problems in Oregon including numerous administrative issues as well as other problems. It seemed to me that Oregon over a period of many years has taken their Commission for the Blind for granted and allowed the downward slide after establishing a Commission. Also a problem for many states is the lack of funding for the senior blind. There was also a discussion of the perception of the senior blind to not be willing

to accept their blindness. Discussion of possible solutions included the need to go with words such as “visually impaired” or “some difficulty seeing”. Most conference participants were in consensus that using whatever language works to get the senior blind help is what should be used. Since Nebraska, among other states, has experience with these issues, some ideas to help with these problems were offered for discussion.

Other items discussed for future topics were the inability of professionals with degrees in rehabilitation to understand the unique skills and how to teach them and what can be done to help improve their knowledge. Amazing to me because of the route Nebraska takes with the 300 hours of working under a blindfold for new personnel at our Commission. The lack of blind people working at Commissions for the blind in other states and how this can be crucial because of the mentoring and role modeling effect for newly blind people was also discussed. This was another amazing fact to me, as Nebraska has no problem with this at all.

Overall, not to be too proud, it is clear that Nebraska either is handling these situations or is looking into them and clearly can be a help to a lot of other states in encouraging them to become better. These conference calls in my opinion are a very worthwhile use of our time for brainstorming and passing information to each other in a way to help make lives better for blind people, not only in Nebraska but all over the country.

## Executive Director's Report

This past quarter has been exceedingly busy. We had a Single State Audit, which is conducted by the State Auditor's Office, but focuses on compliance with the federal grants and regulations. From November through last week, we have also been focused on the Federal Monitoring Review. It culminated last week with the Team from Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in Nebraska for the official review. Prior to the visit, we had numerous conference calls and worked on a large number of documents and data reports; all of which is a part of the official Review.

Final outcomes of both the Single Audit and the Monitoring Review will be reported at the Public Meeting in May 2012.

I am working with NCBVI employees statewide on a schedule for office visits. I was in North Platte for the District meeting in December, but will still go separately to spend time with individual agency employees. We are working on possible dates for March and May.

### Nebraska Center for the Blind

Total Full-time Clients Served 1996 through January 2012: 199

Competitive Employment: 113; Home Makers: 23; Students: 44

22 percent from the total number are still students.

Of the clients that finished training and schooling:

87.8 percent are employed (competitive employment and homemaker)

9.6 percent are not working

## Center Activities

November: Sheldon tour, Commission meeting, Thanksgiving meal

December: Holiday Party

January: Bowling

February: Etiquette Banquet at Southeast Community College, Make up and grooming work-shop

There have been ten tours with thirteen people touring and two three day stays.

Casey Jackson spent a day in the Center working on Motivational Interviewing. It was done as staff training, but this time he interviewed several of the Center clients (those who opted to participate). Counselors observed the sessions. Staff learned a lot and even the clients were impressed with the value of this counseling technique. Center staff continue to work on the skills of Motivational Interviewing.

## Field Services

For the first four months of Federal Fiscal Year 2012 (October 1, 2011 through January 31, 2012), we served 381 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. 10 were closed having achieved their employment goals. 15 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 January 31, 2012, we served 479 clients in all statuses. 72 were closed successfully.

20 were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, institutionalized, and other reasons).

Low vision training was provided to each of the districts in December.

The agency now has a Facebook and Connie Daly is handling it.

Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE):

LB1006 was introduced by Senator Fulton and Avery. This bill will expand opportunities for blind vendors in State buildings and properties.

Two vendors retired. We got a new vendor at one location (York), and in the other location (Ogallala) Universal Vending is running it.

On February 1, we started to manage the four new US Post Office locations in Lincoln, and Universal Vending is running them.

## Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Conchita Hernandez started training in the Center. She will replace Larry Roos as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

This quarter we had a client start an internship at UNL doing food prep. We hired another client who has experience teaching skills to be her job coach. This is a temporary position. We have a client job shadowing phone interviewers at UNMC.

We had clients get jobs at Valentino's as a dishwasher, a security guard at ADM and a BEP vendor. We have been helping people retain their jobs as a scientist, secretary and mechanical engineer.

All of our staff had low vision training with Eileen Rivera. I had training in Social Media and Marketing. I will blog about issues related to blindness and employment once a week in order to increase our online presence.

We were lucky to have Dr. Ruby Ryles visit us from Louisiana Tech University. She is director of the Teachers of Blind Students program. She graciously met with 4 clients, all of whom have a goal of teacher of the blind.

## Omaha District Update – Nancy Flearl

We have been planning all our group teaching sessions for 2012. We have staff on the planning committee for Winnerfest, Project Independence, College workshop and Employment Conference.

We completed our temporary job with Alphapointe, Unisource and Omaha Steaks. Ten clients were able to gain some current experience for their resumes. It was an excellent way to observe people on the job and their work readiness skills. We had to terminate one as he was never on time. Alphapointe has shown interest in hiring a couple of people for competitive positions in the Kansas City area. Unisource, the local company where our team worked to complete the contact with Omaha Steaks, was very impressed with our clients and would like to continue to provide opportunities. It is hoped that they can get a contract to fill all Omaha Steaks needs and then possibly offer employment options to our clients. We continue to work on job development.

With regard to employment we have had a person enter the vending program as a vendor. We have had several that have resumed their positions (farmer/rancher, warehouse worker, receptionist and two as food service workers) and one that has become self employed as a massage therapist.

Referrals have been picking up; December was the slowest month I ever remember experiencing. We have been doing follow up with stations on our PSA in hopes to get the word out. We are also revisiting our Minority Outreach Plan and making contacts.

I will be attending the Project Search training January 31 and Feb 1st. The partnership is with Papillion La Vista school district and Embassy Suites. This is very exciting to have this program in Omaha. The other project that is being developed is with First National Bank and Omaha Public Schools.

Deaf Blind Young Adult Group will be touring the NSD Museum on the old Nebraska School for the Deaf Campus.

Teens Adventures in Blindness Skills (TABS) groups have been working on this quarter Grooming, Etiquette, eating skills, volunteering/giving back to your community.

Seniors Adventures in Independent Living Skills will begin their sessions the week of February 6th through May 10th.

## Client Assistance Program (CAP) – Victoria Rasmussen

I have closed two CAP cases since November 1, 2011.

1. A Mother contacted CAP regarding timeliness of services. As it turned out the counselor was working on this individual's situation but was not following up with the client and family with an update about the actions taken and the delays the counselor was experiencing. Communication was re-established with counselor and client.

2. This individual disagreed with NCBVI's decision to close his case and not provide any further technology training and also disagreed with the decision to not fund a master's degree. Visited with the technology specialist for the area and that individual felt sufficient services and training have been provided for the individual. The client already has a master's degree and his job is consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities and capabilities. This new master's is not required to maintain or advance in his present position. CAP supported both NCBVI's decisions. CAP met with the individual and explained the reasons why NCBVI could not assist him. Also reviewed the Technology Policy with the client and advised him of the next step in the appeal. Individual said he would not be appealing the decision. Said he understood the reasons why.

## Business Office

Bill Brown, Business Manager

Federal Reports submitted for OIB (Older Individuals who are Blind), Part B, and Vocational Rehabilitation

Met with Consultant regarding Monitoring Review and fiscal practices

Participated in Single Audit

Participated in Federal Monitoring Review

Participated in Fiscal Review of PILS (Panhandle Independent Living Services) in Scottsbluff

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

Work with admin staff to get documents prepared for RSA Team – Monitoring Review.

Train Cheryl Livingston on completing monthly vehicle logs for submission to TSB (Transportation Service Bureau). NCBVI will soon be getting a replacement vehicle for our Scottsbluff Office. TSB has been guided as in the past to reduce the number of vehicles in the fleet or reduce the size of the vehicles in the fleet. This means that over the last couple years TSB has not bought any intermediate sedans and they have been replaced with compacts. The compact vehicles will be replaced with subcompacts. This will be continuing until the directive from their Director's office changes.

Attended State Personnel Interactive Information Forum. Dave Robinson and Bill Brown also attended. They talked about Work Day which will be coming to State employees soon. WORKDAY is a new H/R software package will be launching soon, but will at first be available only to H/R folks. Training for HR will begin on February 21.

WORKDAY will be a supplement to EDGE, in that it has some H/R functionality that didn't come with EDGE. Payroll, however, will continue to be processed in EDGE. Open enrollment, set to commence this Spring, will be done through WORKDAY.

Prepared some electronic equipment for Surplus. Bill Brown and I will be meeting with Surplus staff to discuss getting an onsite recycling bin. This is a concept that State Surplus has initiated.

Attended Payroll Human Resource User Group meeting.

Participated in RSA Monitoring Review meetings.

Continuous updating to NCBVI Website.

Dave Robinson – Personnel Officer

Conchita Hernandez started with the agency as a Rehabilitation Counselor on December 6, 2011.

Betty Buresh resigned on December 20, 2011

Denise Johnston Rauterkus is no longer with the agency, effective December 27, 2011

The dependent audit conducted by Aon Hewitt, on behalf of State Personnel was conducted and 17,219 dependents were audited. Aon Hewitt reported a 98.19 percent verification rate, the best they've seen. There were some dependents determined to be ineligible, but NCBVI has not been informed that any dependents from its employees were among those.

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Because open enrollment will be done with a new system, the time allowed to complete it will be longer this year.

NCBVI requested and was approved to create a Technology Program Manager position. We are finalizing the position description, before advertising the position and are in the process of creating a screening tool for it.

Newsline for the Blind

November 2011

Subscribers Added: 22

Total Calls: 1,045

Total Call Minutes: 13,937

Total State News Paper Accesses: 4,384

Total State Channel Accesses: 237

Total TV Listing Accesses: 507

Average Call Length: 13.34 minutes

Percent Local Calls: 48.54

December 2011

Subscribers Added: 3

Total Calls: 1,105

Total Call Minutes: 15,153

Total State News Paper Accesses: 4,009

Total State Channel Accesses: 194

Total TV Listing Accesses: 525

Average Call Length: 13.71

Percent Local Calls: 46.10

January 2012

Subscribers Added: 8

Total Calls: 1,234

Total Call Minutes: 16,267

Total State News Paper Accesses: 4,017

Total State Channel Accesses: 193

Total TV Listing Accesses: 503

Average Call Length: 13.18

Percent Local Calls: 45.37

Total Subscribers as of February 1, 2012: 1573