

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting
Saturday, August 2, 2014
Divots Hotel, Carson Room
4200 W Norfolk Ave
Norfolk, Nebraska

APPROVED MINUTES

9:00 am - Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings, lunch arrangements & other logistics.

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting and began the meeting with introductions.

Commissioners present: Julie Johnson, Chairperson, York; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Becky Rieken, Kearney; and Robert Leslie Newman, Omaha.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR; Bill Brown, Business Manager; Wes Majerus, Program Manager Technology; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; John Schmitt from Norfolk, Jeff Altman, Travel Instructor; Stephanie Wagle, Secretary.

Public Present: Dan Bird, Driver and meeting recorder. Tony Olivero, Kayde Rieken, Barb and Brad Loos, Mathew Pettit and Myra Pettit, all from Lincoln, Shanna Stichler from Omaha, Dick Clyde from Norfolk, Michael Lagreca, Interpreter from Omaha, Dawn Canning, Interpreter from Omaha.

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 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, NFB Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACB and NFB, the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of May 3 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Robert Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the May 3, 2014 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Jim Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Guide dogs and how the agency works with clients with guides.

Mathew Pettit presents first. He starts with how he got his dog. He first heard about guide dogs when he was eight years old but was told he had to wait until he was 18 years old. When Pettit was 19 years old, he applied and in 2013 was approved for a guide dog from the Michigan Guide Dog Center. Pettit points out that there's a positive and a negative to having guide dogs. The positive for him is that having a guide dog helped open up the door to being more independent. He made more friends at school because people asked about where the dog came from. The dog keeps him from running into obstacles. The negative side to having a guide dog is that a guide dog cannot help you cross the street, so on busy streets he always gets help but crosses on quiet streets, like the one by his house by himself. He learned how to take his guide dog to the bus stop and there are a couple bus drivers that did not understand that the dog he had was a guide dog, not a pet.

Hansen makes the comment that he thought Pettit did a good job explaining the pros and cons of having a guide dog. Hansen says that something he has always been clear to him about guide dogs is that it is a personal choice for each blind person whether or not to have a guide dog.

Hansen asks Pettit what the driving force was behind choosing to get a guide dog. Pettit responds by saying he chose to get a guide dog because he loves dogs in general and another reason is that the guide dog helped him to become more independent. Pettit explains that his guide dog can find the stairs faster than his cane. Hansen then asks if having a guide dog helps Pettit with his deafness. Pettit says he uses the vibrate feature on his cell phone to wake him up but now when it goes off the dog jumps on him to make sure Pettit is awake. Pettit adds that he thinks it's cool that when guests come to the door, he cannot hear them knocking, but his guide dog spins in circles and runs around to alert him that someone is at the door.

Newman then asked Pettit if he is still getting instruction from the commission on orientation and instruction for traveling to new places. Pettit says that he still gets advice from Jeff Altman. If Pettit has a question specifically regarding guide dogs, he says that he contacts the guide dog school in Michigan.

Kayde Rieken presents next. Like Pettit, Rieken had wanted a guide dog for a while before she finally got her own. Something Rieken wanted stated specifically is that Jeff Altman came to my house and explained the benefits and drawbacks of owning a guide dog when she was a teenager. Altman advised Rieken when she was sixteen to wait until after high school before getting a guide dog. Rieken recalls that even though she didn't want to hear it at the time, she realizes now that he was right; high schoolers are kind of obnoxious and a loud/chaotic high school environment wouldn't be a good environment for a new guide dog or a new guide dog user.

Johnson asks what Rieken sees as the benefits of owning a guide dog. Rieken says she does love her cane but prefers traveling with her guide dog because when it comes to obstacles, the guide dog gets her around them better. Rieken adds that she also likes using her guide dog in the snow over a cane. Johnson asked Rieken that if looking back now that she has experience with guide dogs, does she think Jeff Altman was right. Rieken says yes, even though at the time, she didn't like that Altman was convincing her parents that she shouldn't get a guide dog but yes, he was right about it not being the right time.

Hansen comments that sometimes hotels create obstacles as do various places in Lincoln, making it risky for travel. Hansen asks Rieken if having a guide dog helps with obstacles. Rieken says that one thing her guide dog does is not allow her to go further when there are obstacles that Rieken can't hear, such as hybrid cars. Hansen asks if she went to the same place both time she got a guide dog, of which Rieken has had two. Rieken says she independently researched various schools that train guide dogs, and after talking to many, decided that *Seeing Eye Inc.* in New Jersey was the best fit for her both times.

Newman says that he worked for the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired during a time when there was a strong philosophy that the blind guy can do it themselves and does not need to be lead around by man or beast. Newman asks Rieken how she thinks the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired approaches guide dogs philosophically today. Rieken says that she feels that NCBVI is neutral nowadays. Newman asks if there is anything NCBVI staff could improve upon to understand and help guide dog users. Rieken points out that she went through her center training before she had a guide dog but believes that every blind person should have cane skills first as a foundation for competent, independent travel. Rieken tells a story about when her guide dog got sick and she had to use her cane skills during that time until her guide dog was well enough to work again. Rieken was in college at the time and used her cane skills, which she always has to fall back on, while her guide dog got better. Jirak shares the opinion that only people with competent cane skills get guide dogs. Rieken explains that in theory people should have good cane skill first however some people think that a guide dog will magically improve their travel skills. Johnson adds that different schools have different prerequisites for having cane skills varies therefore the definition of competent cane skills is not universal amongst guide dog schools.

Hansen asked what factors went into her decision for what guide dog school she chose. Rieken says that she wanted to have full ownership of her guide dog, so she went with a school that offered full ownership over the other schools that only offered partial ownership. Rieken adds that at *Seeing Eye Inc.* she felt respected as a person and not viewed as a poor blind person who wanted a magic dog. She says that she felt like she was viewed as a person who was making the decision to own a guide dog.

Shanna Stichler presents next. Stichler is from the Omaha area. Stichler starts by saying that her experience is a little bit different. Like Pettit and Rieken, Stichler says

that she wanted a guide dog from an early age. She raised a puppy through a 4H project when was a kid but didn't get her own guide dog until she was 21 years old. Stichler wanted a guide dog in high school but is glad she didn't get one then because she feels now that she didn't have the skill set then to utilize a guide dog. The primary reason Stichler wanted a guide dog was for the ease of travel. Stichler still uses her cane and values it for mobility. A guide dog she feels is quicker for her because of the guide dog's fast pace now that she has strong cane skills to fall back on. The guide dog also compensates for another condition she has aside from blindness. Stichler adds that a lot of people feel that guide dogs make them more social but to her personally, the social aspect gets repetitive and to her, is a drawback to having a guide dog. Stichler says she feels the social aspect is one of the least appealing aspects of having a guide dog. *Guide Dogs for the Blind* in California was experimenting with hiring blind people in their training department and that she should apply.

Guide Dogs for the Blind, in San Rafael California did an experiment where they hired blind people to work in the training department of the guide dog school. This school for guide dogs is in the San Francisco Bay area and Stichler worked there for five years. A guide dog school is a stressful place to work your own guide dog due to the various distractions, says Stichler. She wasn't able to use her guide dog much because she was working with young dogs; getting them on vans to go work in town, taking them to the vet, etc. She actually used her cane a lot while she was working at the guide dog school because of these distractions. Stichler's guide dog spent much of its time in a crate because it wasn't fair to have them around young exuberant puppies. The dog that she has now is one that she trained.

Hansen asks whether Stichler believes getting a dog from a guide dog school or training one's own is better. He also asks whether there are set requirements for a guide dog to be certified either personally or by a guide dog school. Stichler says that guide dogs are required to have certain skills but there is no law that dictates what guide dogs is and is not a guide dog. She adds that if a dog isn't trained properly, the user will know because they won't feel safe. A training center trains a dog to work with a particular client but when you train a dog on your own, that's on you, clarifies Stichler. Primarily training a guide dog is a challenge but she had the financial capability and the desire to do it. Stichler also wanted a German Shepherd and most guide dog schools are getting away from German Shepherds. Guide dog training is pretty time consuming and expensive but is not difficult. Most people choose to get their dogs from a breeder but some have good luck from dog rescue centers. There are points where she didn't think her current guide dog will make it but that's because she is very critical and the reason she is critical is because she doesn't want to put an incompetent guide dog out in public.

Newman says that we are consumers who are providing people with the best information to make informed choices. What information can you recommend to us as far as things to read, to view that would help them make choices and how can we train our team to make sure they help consumers make the best choice. Stichler says that *Guide Dogs For The Blind* has a lot of information on their website as well as a questionnaire for prospective guide dog users that evaluates how knowledgeable and

prepared they are about working with a guide dog, There is a lot of information for Mobility Instruction about techniques, as well as assessments for prospective guide dog users at Guidedogs.com. There are many guide dog list serves people can join as well. One on one conversation with multiple guide dog users should be included with all other methods of gaining education about guide dogs. I think most people are willing to sit down with prospective dog owners. A guide dog does not equal a GPS device. It takes six months to a year before you're a team-- the first six months is a lot of work initially but if you consistent it will become worth it. The different between a cane and dog is a lack of tactile feedback. You are losing some tactile cues to gage an environment.

Newman goes on to ask if all guide dog schools are created equal and how to evaluate them and which ones are ones to stay away from. Shanna believes that all schools put out good dogs but no, not all schools are equal. It's important that the prospective guide dog user does their research by calling in to guide dog schools and going to websites. Also making sure that the health screening is strong. That is a clue if the school is redeemable or not. Looking at their assessments is also a good way of figuring out if the school is a good fit for you or not.

Johnson adds that talking to handlers and asking them specific questions you have about working with a guide dog, is key to becoming educated about guide dogs. Jirak adds that the American Council of the Blind (ACB) has an affiliate for guide dog users and prospective guide dog users called, *Guide Dog User's International*. The National Federation for the Blind (NFB) has a resource for guide dog users and prospective guide dog users too called, *The National Association of Guide Dog Users* (NAGDO). ACB and NFB will have simulations of guide dog handling at their respective conventions in the form of a demo dog or a robot dog. Schmitt comments that he went to the guide dog school in Detroit for a tour and he had the opportunity to go there and learn as a professional in the field. Hansen says that he knows that the commission will send staff out into the field to become more knowledgeable. Dr. Van Zandt explains that when there is interest expressed, the agency sends staff out to learn more about such an area.

Dick Clyde presents next. Clyde got his first guide dog in 1996. He's had three dogs so far and in two or so more years will be going back for his third. Clyde is really glad that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired are doing more with guide dog education. Clyde says that you cannot have a guide dog without cane skills but when that's there, as long as the individual doesn't mind walking, they should get a guide dog if they want one. Clyde says that he would like to see more help being given when guide dog users have problems. He gives an example of when he and his guide dog were attacked by a pit bull and it took a year and a half to walk by that house again. Clyde states that he got both of his dogs for *Guide Dogs for the Blind* in Oregon. When you go get a dog Clyde agrees that it take 6 months to a year to create the team. When he gets his third dog an instructor from the guide dog school will come and walk with him, check his speed, his height, etc., to gauge what kind of dog would suit him the best. Clyde criticizes the way guide dog certification is handled by giving the example that someone could open a guide dog school right here in Norfolk, Nebraska, get dogs

from the pound and call them guide dogs. Clyde says that he does not have the desire to train his one guide dog. Johnson asks if he thinks training a guide dog on one's own should be an option for others, pointing out that she trained the guide dog she has now and trained two before him. Clyde says that decision is based on personal preference but he wouldn't do it. Hansen interjects to say that standards are helpful so every guide dog meets that standard. Clyde knows the guide dog that trained all three of his guide dogs.

Clyde tells a story about when once fifteen years he was at a crosswalk of a lane street in Norfolk and when the parallel traffic started he began walking. When he got to the middle the street, the light changed and he was in danger of getting hit by oncoming traffic. Clyde says that he believes the light changed happened too quickly for anyone, blind or otherwise to make it from one side to the other in one light rotation. Clyde contacted the city administrator, the mayor, the head of the street department, and the city councilman, who all came down to the crosswalk to hear Clyde out and see how he crossed the street. They watched him cross the street when the lights changed and saw how quick the rotation was but did nothing. He called the American's With Disabilities Act and two months later two representatives came to Norfolk to investigate. They took pictures at every intersection on Clyde's route to HyVee. City workers were caught changing the time of the light ahead of time. Clyde upheld a ten year complaint against the city of Norfolk and the state of Nebraska. A year ago Washington sent Clyde a letter stating that the case was being dropped against the city but not the state. Clyde told them that the state had done everything they were asked but the city had done about half. The crosswalk is fixed today but it took all of this stress to achieve the timing on one light-- even after expressing his right under the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA), the sidewalks and intersections in Norfolk and most of the states are still horrible where accessibility is concerned.

Jeff Altman presents next. Hansen asks how working with someone in the center works as a far as orientation and mobility if they're a guide dog user. He also asks how working with someone who uses a guide dog is different from someone who just uses a cane. Altman answers by saying that everyone in training must have cane travel. A guide dog user can take their guide dog out at breaks and lunch time and go to and from the center with the guide dog. Toward the end of training, a guide dog user can work with their dog during travel class. Hansen asks if there are any differences to how Altman teaches travel to individuals who use a guide dog and if there are different techniques that aren't applicable to guide dogs. Altman explains that he is certified in cane travel, not in how to work with guide dogs. Altman says that if an individual is having trouble on the bus or finding an address with the guide dog or if there is a problem with a person having access to facilities, Altman will offer general advice for self-advocacy but not specifically on guide dog handling.

Johnson points out that she does not believe the center need train guide dog users on how to travel with their guide dogs but that a level of understanding be upheld to help individuals who do work with guide dogs. Altman explains how he does his best to explain to clients that a guide dog does not replace good cane travel skills. Altman adds

that it is a different set of techniques depending on whether an individual is traveling using a cane or a guide dog.

Newman asks what is being done to help people make choices and who is providing information to clients and if there is a check list for supervisors to train their staff. Altman says that issues regarding guide dogs are included in discussions at the vocation rehab training center. New staff engages in conversations about guide dogs and are oriented to center policy regarding guide dogs. Altman believes a formalized system for training new staff about guide dogs would not be a bad idea. Serván points out that in the past, the center has tried to educate staff about guide dogs but we are moving in a more formalized direction now with educating all staff about guide dog policy.

Johnson thinks this is a good idea. Daly makes the comment that the center has gone for tours of the Washington/Kansas Schools and does plan to educate the two new staff members on guide dog policy under this new formalized system in her district of Lincoln.

Schmitt adds that once a guide dog of a client got traumatized after being hit by a hybrid car its owner could not hear. Schmitt got that individual in touch with a guide dog school for assistance because he, himself did know how to properly offer advice. Johnson says that this illustrates her point beautifully; that it's the dog schools job to handle the guide dogs and the center's job to teach travel orientation and provide information to clients about recourses. Schmitt illustrates that staff need to check their personal opinions about guide dogs versus canes at the door because those opinions are irrelevant. Jirak asks does the staff feel comfortable giving instruction to a blind person who uses a guide dog. Dr. Van Zandt's answer is that we don't act on part of the guide dog experts but we connect clients with the resources to learn about guide dogs and in essence the center connects clients to those experts. Connie adds that the center doesn't just provide training but an understanding that the client has rights and it's their choice to choose. Daly points out that we provide information to clients about what the rights are regardless of the tools they choose.

Johnson brings up documents and suggests that they be updated. Johnson points out that the document is dated and needs a modern touch. Newman adds that staff's goal for working with individuals working with guide dogs is to point out common sense for the client. Johnson adds an example that you can't use a guide dog to shore line but that there's a shift in mindset for helping a person navigate their environment with a guide dog versus a cane. Altman points out that he thinks it's best for a person to go to a place first with a cane and then go back with a guide dog. He thinks that since we have a structured discovery base to the training we provide, it really comes down to figuring it out through common sense and adds that the professionals at the guide dog schools are the ones who need to answer specific questions about guide dogs.

Public Comment:

Clyde says that about a year and a half ago *League of Human Dignity* in Norfolk set up a program for first responders to discuss conduct of first responders toward guide dogs.

The fire department and police department were invited to take part in this discussion. Clyde was there because he sits on this board and at that time asked whether first responder staff knew what to do with guide dogs should their person get injured. The discussion was also for how to handle situations involving people with other disabilities, such as those in electric wheelchairs. Clyde makes the comment that at this meeting, it was a full house, people came from over a hundred miles away but not one person from Norfolk attended.

Break

A break was taken at 10:55 am. The meeting resumed at 11:14 am.

Commissioner's Report- Workforce Investment Act. Johnson brings the meeting to order and starts off talking about the long term changes that are being discussed and processed at this time. She announces that after her second term she is not going to seek reelection. She opens the floor for other board members to speak on behalf of work they've been doing.

Jirak spoke on going to the National ACB Convention and submitted a two page report from the convention that will be included in the minutes in its entirety. He sums up the experience by saying it was worthwhile. Jirak also announces that by choice, he is no longer going to be the president of The Council of Citizen with Low Vision International.

Newman expresses that he appreciates Jirak's involvement as a Commissioner. Newman goes on to say he attended the National NFB Convention. Hansen had the opportunity to spend an evening at the center with the Work and Gain Experience in the Summer (WAGES). Hansen says that he's been working administrative staff on the structure of commission finances as a reference for the board.

Rieken also spent time at the center with the WAGES participants, and enjoyed getting to meet them and learn about what they're doing in their jobs. Rieken attended a National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) Lincoln chapter meeting. She was a counselor at the Project Independence camp (PI) and thought it was amazing watching the kids blossom and felt it was very touching. Newman adds to this that he has been volunteering teaching Braille at the Omaha office and also attended WAGES banquet. Jirak promoted the ACB during seminar at WAGES as well.

Report from the Executive Director

August 2, 2014

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt began her report by highlighting the significant amendment to the Rehab Act which is included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, known as WIOA. The new act offers opportunities and increased services to blind youth and requires state agencies. One of the new requirements is that at 15 percent of Vocation Rehab or VR funds be spent every year on providing pre-employment transition services. Part B, or State Independent Living program will no longer be in the

department of Education Rehab Service Administration and is moving to Administration for Community Services and Health and Human Service at a national level.

Van Zandt believes we will be able to support advance training for kids and youth and extend employment funds to them to foster an increased emphasis on competitive integration in the workplace. One big change is a unified state plan between those entities and core programs. An added 1.8 to 2 percent for training and technical goes to training and technical assistance. Part B will go away from rehab. RSA will continue to administer programs that are moving to health and human services until orderly transfer can happen. In-Service Training grants will be eliminated. Our staff training will not be changed by the loss of the \$20,000 per year grant. The Commission always spends more than the grant, as ongoing training is valued as a way to invest in the employees.

We have two people being honored this fall by Governor Heineman. Shane Buresh is NCBVI Employee of the Year; Sarah Stewart is NCBVI Supervisor of the year. Both are exemplary workers who contribute greatly to improving life experiences for blind clients.

I was on full medical leave following back surgery from April 23 until June 9. During that time, the agency functioned well with leadership from Carlos, Bob and Bill, as well as District Supervisors and all the staff taking care of business statewide. Bob served as Interim Supervisor for the Center; Carlos filled in that role during times when Bob was out. On June 9, I returned half time for a few weeks. I am now back full time, for the most part.

Details of staff changes are later in this report, in the HR section. A newly hired Counselor for Omaha is now in training, Tim Jefferson. We have two new Voc Rehab Techs on board: in Omaha, Monique Orrante and in Lincoln, Stephanie Wagle.

Julie asked about the phone call where new staff meets commissioners. Pearl agrees and will look into putting that into action.

We have decided that VR Techs and other support staff hired will not go through Center Training. Instead, they will begin in their position immediately. Training in blindness skills and philosophy will be done on-site, by their Supervisor and team mates, as well as time spent with Administrative staff on aspects of their role. For example, Dottie Wilmott spends time in the new-hire's office to teach the person the work to be done in eForce.

During the past quarter, I met with the Leadership Team and with Dr. Stelter. I have continued to attend some meetings with Center staff and clients, Field offices, NBE Vendors Committee, Nebraska State agency directors, Lincoln/Lancaster Multicultural Advisory Committee, with officials from Army National Guard for NBE issues, with OCIO people on various technology issues and projects, several conference calls with federal entities and national organizations, as well as state based including technology issues. We also met with Personnel from Duncan Aviation to discuss partnering for employment possibilities for our clients. They also toured the Center during their visit.

Work on the State Plan is renewed. Rehab Services Administration (RSA) has sent feedback and corrections. The revisions were completed by July 31. This time the corrections were not too cumbersome, as they have been sometimes in the past. There is not a need for Board approval, but the feedback and specific changes are sent to the Commissioners for input.

The Agency Enhancement project with Dr. Nancy Stelter continues, with group sessions and individual coaching sessions are being provided to build our individual skills as well as the team as a whole. The project is nearing completion, but specific dates are yet to be determined.

Our relocation request for Lincoln District, the Center, and Administrative offices is still in process with State of Nebraska Administrative Services Building Division. It is moving slowly; we act on our tasks as soon as they come; now it is back in their court.

Planning is in the works for a Fall Statewide Staff Meeting. The meeting will be held in Kearney. A key focus will be sharing ideas with each other for teaching and counseling techniques – recognizing and taking advantage of the vast internal resources that exist within our own staff members.

On the AWARE client services database software, we have met with the company as well as with OCIO to determine best ways to proceed. Wes and Bill are the leads on this, with of course testing and input from direct service staff, supervisors, and other administrative staff.

We are working diligently on our Biennium Budget Request. It must be completed and locked within the State Budget System in the Governor's Office. That topic will be discussed later in this Board meeting, so will provide further details further on today.

We have also been undergoing a Single State Audit. This is done jointly with our agency and Nebraska General Voc Rehab. The State Auditor's office conducts the audit on compliance with federal regulations for both agencies of the federal grants. Bill and I have met with the auditors. Bill, in particular, has provided numerous documents to the team of auditors.

Hiring New Center Supervisor

Two internal applicants were interviewed on August 1st. The position will be offered to one of those individuals this upcoming week. Bob Deaton and Carlos Serván have been managing the supervision of the center effectively between Fatos Floyd's departure and during Dr. Pearl Van Zandt's leave due to her back surgery.

Field Services

During our third quarter of Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (April 1 through June 30, 2014), we served 792 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Thirty nine (39) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Forty five (45) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, transfers to another agency, unable to locate, disability too significant to benefit from VR, failure to cooperate, and other). This number is higher than usual, as Counselors are attending to clients whom they have not been able to achieve contact, to move people either into more active status or to close their cases. An individual can always come back when they are more ready for services and interested in vocational goals.

In the Independent Living (IL) track, we have served five hundred and fifty-nine (559) clients were served, in all statuses. One hundred seventy eight (178) were closed successfully, with five (5) transferring to VR services; twenty three (23) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons).

Nebraska Center for the Blind

ACTIVITIES

5 Tours of potential Center Students and 3 Three Day Stays (the follow up to a tour for people seriously considering Center training).

All WAGES Students also toured the Center, as a part of a combined Center and WAGES activity.

Three clients attended the National Federation of the Blind Convention.

Three Clients went horseback riding and hiking.

We hosted a Fire Safety class for Center students and Field clients.

Tour/dinner and seminar for the WAGES Students at the Center; two Commissioners also attended the activity.

WAGES students toured the Apartments on a second evening.

Herb garden activity - the clients planted their own herbs.

STATISTICS

Total Full-time Clients Served between 1996 through August 2014: 226

Of the clients that finished training and schooling;

88 Percent are employed (competitive employment and homemaker)

42 are still in school or college

As of July 23rd there are 4 full time students, 1 staff trainee, 4 WAGES students (half time until 7-25)

1 new client starts Center Training 8-25

Field Services by District

North Platte District by Sarah Stewart

The summer months are flying by. We have had several training opportunities in the North Platte District this quarter. On May 7 and 8th Carlos Serván and Dottie Wilmott joined our district to provide training on the Rehabilitation rules. Staff found the training and discussion very helpful in more clearly defining services and policies. On May 15th, we had a follow up discussion from our April 29th Myers-Briggs training with Dr. Stelter.

We had a face to face district meeting on May 27th in North Platte. Bill Brown, Carlos Servan, and Wes Majerus were kind enough to join us for that meeting. Dr. Kristin Burwick, a North Platte optometrist met with our group to share information and discuss how we can work together to better meet the comprehensive needs of patients.

Heather Puckett, the new Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing representative in North Platte also provided a refresher on their services.

VR staff from all districts congregated in Kearney on May 28th for a day long placement meeting to “Share Our Best” ideas from around the state. It provided a chance for some of our veteran VR staff to share experiences and strategies with newer VR staff regarding placement. Cheryl Hansen from the Referral Institute in Lincoln provided a short training on interactive types to assist staff with identifying their own type and those of others and how to work more effectively with other types. Chas Wiepert, the HR director from Kearney’s new Hyvee also joined our group to discuss how we can better partner with Hyvee and other large employers.

As a continuation of placement training efforts in our district, Carol Jenkins spent some time with Scott Pavelka and Cristal Dimas on June 25th and 26th. It was very helpful to have the opportunity to discuss job readiness and placement strategies with someone who has had more experience in those areas. Carol also facilitated some employer contacts in Kearney. We really appreciate Carol and the Omaha District for their willingness to assist us with increasing our skills and knowledge in this area.

The general VR agency in Kearney has also been great to partner with and Cristal Dimas got to spend some time with one of their placement counselors making employer and community contacts last month. We are working on arranging for a similar

opportunity in North Platte. The Scottsbluff office already works very closely with VR in that area.

One student from the North Platte district participated in the WAGES program this summer. Scott Pavelka got his first experience working the WAGES program orientation with the student. We are glad the program continues as it greatly benefits the participants in building skills and gaining work and life experiences.

I will be attending the Project Search International Conference that will be held at the Embassy Suites site in La Vista on July 22-25th. I am really looking forward to my first Project Search national conference and the chance to network with partners from all over the country and get ideas for the Search sites in our area. Our district has sites in Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney and North Platte and I hope increase our involvement in those partnerships.

We have 3 kids from the North Platte District registered to participate in Project Independence at Camp Calvin Crest this summer. Scott Pavelka served on the committee and it sounds like they have another fun program planned.

The North Platte District had one successful closure for an assistant high school principal this quarter.

Omaha District Highlights August 2014 by Nancy Flear!

We have had a summer skills camp for high school students to gain some intensive skills in using JAWS, Braille and the long white cane. We ran this for 5 weeks. Many of these high school students are new JAWS users. We have had 3-4 consistent volunteers to assist us with this program. A big thanks you to Kathy and Kelly for having the vision to develop this and we are so thankful to our volunteers.

We have 3 students that due to health could not attend WAGES in Lincoln but have been working a few days each week here in Omaha. One is at University of Nebraska at Omaha, HYPER Building the student is interested in sports and working with teams. The second student is interested in something in the medical field and is working at the University Of Nebraska Student Health Center. Lastly we have a student working with one of the Randolph Sheppard Vendors as he had expressed a strong interest in learning about the vending business.

We have two new staff. Yeah! Monique Orrante started in Omaha on July 14th. She has been observing staff, reading articles, learning Braille and cane travel. She will be meeting with community resources that she will be sharing with the public and consumers. Tim Jefferson started at in the Orientation Center on July 14th.

We have been attending networking events, events at the Chamber. Ashley has been working with Metro Area Placement Professionals meeting and touring area businesses.

We have a couple of new Randolph Sheppard Vendors and have been working on supporting them as have taken over these units.

On June 11th Elaine coordinated the Hand and Hand activity to attend the Proclamation for Deaf Blind Awareness Week.

Carol spent a few days at the end of June in the North Platte District working with VR Staff on placement.

We have met with Nancy Stelter to do the Myers Briggs on June 3rd and a follow up meeting June 21st.

Carol Jenkins and I attended the NFB National Convention. I did have a chance to visit with transition students and staff from the Lighthouse. They have a good program that we were told about by Dr. Karen Wolffe and will be having more dialogue.

Cheryl worked a large Diversity Fair on Friday, July 18th it was the 50th anniversary of the civil rights movement. They estimate over 3000 people attended.

We have been working on our intensive vocational counseling training we will start in August.

We have 4 people that we have placed in employment status supporting their ability to maintain employment. 2 are nurses; the other is an assistant manager of a fast food restaurant, Physical Therapy Assistant

6 people in employment, General Helper-Production, Information Records Clerk, Machine Operator, packager, Customer Service Clerk, Civil Engineer

Lincoln District by Connie Daly

Shane Buresh was named employee of the year. Shane is being recognized for the excellence of his work as well as his coordination of Project Independence. He is coordinating that project again with a committee of staff around the state.

We have hired a part time support staff in the Lincoln District. Stephanie Wagle is starting on July 28th. We are very excited to have her as part of our team.

Larry Roos attended benefits training in Missouri and he will continue to share his expertise state wide. Eric Buckwalter is attending Employment Services training at NE Vocational Rehabilitation.

We decided not to have the GATE program that would have started in August. We approached the Omaha office about developing a joint skills training effort at Mahoney State park in September. We will be able to manage 12 to 13 participants.

We had a Fire safety activity with the Lincoln Fire Department on July 12th. We had seven children, 3 WAGES participants and the center students and staff. We learned to put batteries in smoke detectors, how to put out a stove fire and how to use a fire extinguisher.

We had clients that got jobs at Selleck Hall in food service, Madonna in laundry, League of Human Dignity as a chore provider, Thedford Public Schools as a science teacher, York Hospital in food service, Care Corp as a Receptionist. Cargill Meat Solutions as a slaughterer, Cargill as a meat packer and two people got jobs as telephone interviewers with Bureau of Sociological Research.

Business Office - Bill Brown

BEP Insurance and Bonding Issues

Budget training and Preparation

Staffing Discussion for Agency

Agency Reorganization Discussions

Processing AWARE procurement

Agency Long Term Financial Planning

LB 429 Log

Agency Business Process Discussions

Federal Single Audit

Lincoln Building Needs Assessment

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

Assisted Bill with scanning documents to meeting the LB 429 Contracts Requirements.

Completed inventory scanning for Division 001. Don Ward does the inventory scanning for Division 003 (Vending).

Completed registrations and reservations for some clients and staff attending National Conventions.

Worked with Sarah Stewart on Staff Appreciation gift for 2014.

HR Quarterly Highlights – Dave Robinson

Jan Stokebrand's position was reclassified from Accounting Clerk to Staff Assistant II, effective July 7, 2014. Reclassification was requested and approved based on the scope of Jan's duties having changed from mostly accounting/bookkeeping tasks to also include additional duties involving policy and planning.

Monique Orrante was hired on July 14th into the Voc. Rehab. Technician position in Omaha, to fill the vacancy created by Amy Marcotte's departure.

Tim Jefferson was hired on July 14th into the Voc. Rehab. Counselor II position in Omaha, to fill the vacancy created by Monica Tripp's departure.

Stephanie Wagle was hired for the part-time Secretary II position at the front desk in Lincoln and will begin her duties on July 28th.

State Personnel has approved our request to reinstate the Voc. Rehab. Technician position in Kearney. The position has been advertised and closed on July 25th. The position is a .5 FTE (half-time).

We completed another open enrollment, with no notable complications reported.

Technology Program Board Highlights by Wes Majerus

The quarter between May and August has been eventful for the Technology Program. Here are some of the highlights.

Operations

Early in the quarter, I worked with staff on Open Enrollment. One observation that is important to note is that the numbers of access technology users who requested assistance in completing the Open Enrollment process was down drastically this time around. The software continues to function in a useable way, and we diligently worked with the State Personnel Office to have the Options Guide that outlines benefit plans and choices made into an accessible format. We did not achieve the goal of having this guide out at the same time as the PDF version of the Options guide. The only problematic area of Open Enrollment this year occurred for those who had to enter beneficiaries from scratch. I worked through this piece with those affected, and have also reported the defect to State Personnel. A ticket is open with the manufacturer, Workday, to see if the difficulties being experienced could be rectified.

A number of projects are still in progress. We continue to work toward purchase and implementation of the AWARE client tracking system. A meeting is to take place between the Office of the CIO and the Commission after the due date of this report. It is

at this meeting that we hope to learn what will be necessary for completing our required IT Project proposal for the budget and begin working with the OCIO to determine next steps in this process. We are also working to renovate the Omaha technology lab. I went with Omaha Office staff to look at furniture for this lab and am awaiting the quotes for the work to be done. Rollout of wifi technology to the additional five offices that were not equipped with wifi is in progress. As of this writing, new wifi has been added to Offices in Omaha, Kearney, Norfolk, and North Platte. We hope to have wifi connected in Scottsbluff in the coming weeks. I have also been working closely with the Business office to complete technology aspects of the budget such as the Agency Information Technology Plan. This plan outlines current and planned technology assets in a number of categories and asks questions related to security and other policies.

This quarter saw two training opportunities. I attended the third session of the National Rehab Leadership Institute seminar series. This seminar focused on building constituency, and was held in Washington, DC. We met with many influential policy makers who shaped the rehab system in the past, and with those who are currently working on public policy. We were also prepared for an exercise that will be completed in the culminating session where a decision-making model will be applied to a scenario within the agency. I also attended the 2014 National Federation of the Blind National Convention along with two members of the Tech Team and other Commission staff. Technology highlights from the Convention included changes to the JAWS licensing scheme, the introduction of a JAWS training bundle, and demonstrations of a new print reading app for the iPhone. I also assisted with the Omaha Office's Summer Skills Camp by talking with students about the importance of technology and teaching students tech skills.

Accessibility

The Commission continues to complete limited projects on the accessibility front. This quarter, State Accounting made a test environment of the Payroll and Financial Center upgrade available. The PFC is scheduled to be upgraded by September of this year. The application has a different look and feel; however, basic aspects of it do appear to be accessible. The Commission also continues to work with State Personnel on the Cornerstone Training and Talent Management system. We continue to impress upon officials from State Personnel the need for accessibility. They understand this need and agree with the changes we are requesting. They and we continue to test and document new releases of Cornerstone to test the accessibility of the system. Up to this point, not many changes have been made from an accessibility standpoint.

Unfinished Business

Budget and Biennium Update

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt begins the report, saying that there is an intention to not request additional funding for the biennium. That is, to remain at level funding from State General Funds. Raises will be added to salaries by the state. The budget request includes personal services, as well as what we need in terms of the positions we currently have along with the ones we're in process of adding to the budget. The agency is looking ahead to staffing issues and issues in keeping staff computers, technology, data management system, and NBE vending machines up to date. Each budget is written for a two year period.

We are also required to prepare a modification proposal, if funding is only approved at 95% or 5% less than the full budget request. To complete the modification, we must evaluate spending to see if what the impact will be if funded at the lower level. The text of the budget was provided to the board, in its draft form.

Bill Brown added that a major object category or a global review of the budget which lists the operating expenses, operating equipment, and personal services has been provided. Brown notes that he is willing to go through the smaller items of the report if anybody is interested. The budget is made up of 173 lines and 5 grants.

Van Zandt defines the following terms for clarity.

1. Personal Services - the salary paid to personnel.
2. PSL (Personal Service Limitation) - meaning the limits that the state sets for each budget.
3. Operations - Includes salaries and covers all operations costs.
4. Aid - Money spent directly for clients and client services.

Johnson asked how the new office space impacts the budget. Brown says that he put \$50,000 in the budget for the move. Brown believes it will take fifty to one hundred thousand to move from the Lincoln office to a new location. A Request for Proposals (RFP) has to be sent out to vendors for a true estimate or feedback for potential vendors but a budget has to be submitted to the state first. Brown mentions that standard office spaces are smaller than the current location in Lincoln, so depending on configurations, the move might cost less than \$50,000. Standard big office space is 120 sq. ft., which is about 10x12 and the Lincoln office spaces are about 14x18 sq. ft. and there's an eight foot wide hall way running the entire length of the building.

Van Zandt adds that standard state office buildings are cubicle size. Our offices tend to be larger because Counselors and other staff conduct training and counseling sessions; they are not just doing office work. Brown adds that 64 sq. ft. was the size of one of the plans he saw. Brown continues by saying we have to go through the state building division and though we can negotiate, they have the final say.

Johnson adds that we are guessing at this point because a budget has to be submitted first. Brown adds that we can draw from unobligated funds, or monies that went unspent.

Johnson asked about the new part time position opening up in Kearney, pointing out that that position existed in the past and asked how this new part time position effects the budget. Van Zandt answers by saying the VR Tech position was a full time position that at one point got removed and recently the position was created at a part time status.

Van Zandt adds that when the agency is seeking to add a new position, a need has to be determined; the salary has to be available in the budget, and not exceed the level in the PSL. Van Zandt mentions that the agency has never been turned down to add a new position and that is due in part to doing the research and the homework before we make the official request. New positions have to be approved by State Personnel and the State Budget Office.

Brown adds that the funding for the position in Kearney has been in the budget there has not been anyone in that position for a while, therefore, the current budget includes that position.

NFB Newsline® Update

July 29, 2014

Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to the Dog Days of summer! In honor of this quarter's focus topic and the start of International Assistance Dog Week this report will be paws atively entertaining! Strap on the harness and hang on for the dog run!

The past quarter has been hush puppies for NFB-Newsline® with very little going on. However at the National Federation of the Blind National Convention I did get a chance to work the Newsline table in the exhibit hall and obtain some kibble and bits of information from other state coordinators. It was great to compare information with other states and find out we're doing very well for our size!

With the report being submitted before the end of the month July's stats are not available, so listed are the stats for May and June. As of May 1st NFB-Newsline® had 1,748 subscribers with 3 added in May and 8 in June for a total of 1,759. Subscribers read 15,029 minutes of content via the phone in May with the average call lasting 11.12 minutes. During June subscribers read 14,518 minutes and averaged 10.92 minutes per call. The percentage of local calls was at 39.68 in May and up to 44.67 in June. I don't believe that you can't teach old dog new tricks so I will continue to get out the word about the local number to up those percentages.

Besides accessing NFB-Newsline® via the phone subscribers read content through the following methods. Online web sessions totaled 2,827 in May and 1,992 in June with 1,685 E-mails sent both months. The mobile app was accessed 154 times in May

and 186 in June. In Your Pocket, used via the Victor Reader Stream, was used 412 times in May and 393 in June.

Hot Diggety Dog and now for the final section of the stats; the content that was accessed by NFB-Newsline® subscribers! Nebraska Newspapers: May – 3021, June – 2,097. National Newspapers: May – 531, June – 621. Nebraska Local Channels: May – 123, June – 128. Local Weather and Emergency: May – 200, June – 209. Breaking News Online: May – 12, June – 29. TV Listings: May – 512, June – 488. Magazines: May – 75, June – 97.

That concludes my quarterly report, so I won't hound you anymore! As always if you have questions don't bark up the wrong tree, give me a call, toss me an email or fetch me on twitter!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) by Victoria Rasmussen

1. Question about reapplying for services.
2. Extension of Center training.

Lunch

A lunch break was taken at 11:54. The meeting resumed at 1:17.

Unfinished Business (continued)

Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update

Quarterly NBE report August 2, 2014

We have a new vendor at the main post office in Omaha, Ross Pollpeter, who started the first week of May and is doing very well.

We were awarded the Contract in June for the 1526 K Street building, in Lincoln, for vending machines. This is a state building and Victor Ireland is operating this facility.

We are working with a second new person in Omaha. His name is Ron Davison. Ron is a licensed vendor from Omaha who left the program in good standing. He has requested to return. We started Ron at two post offices and two other Federal buildings in Omaha the first of July.

We were awarded the USA Joint Forces Canteen in Lincoln. We sent all the insurance requirements and met with them on July 22 to go over few final procedures. Antoinette Cervantes will start operating this facility in August 18.

We are still waiting for approval on a future contract with the VA Hospital in Lincoln.

We have been offered new vending permits with The TSA (airport) in Lincoln and Grand Island. This is only for a couple of machines in each building and very few employees.

We have sent a permit on a new location with Dept. of Agriculture office in North Platte to open soon. This building will also have a couple of vending machine to serve few federal employees.

We have set the date and place for our annual retreat. It will be in Grand Island, Sept 19 and 20.

We have three new vendors in training: Ross Pollpeter, Lori Jacobsen, and Antoinette Cervantes.

Lori will be operating two machines at the commission and 4 post offices in Lincoln in the next few weeks.

Update on the I-80 rest area project. Don is waiting on the snack machines to be ready. The project was on hold but now we are ready to begin delivering the pop machines.

In General information, Don has been approached by two counselors who have clients interested in the vending program. One is in Nebraska City and one is in North Platte. So we may be looking for new locations in those areas.

Public Comment

Barbara Loos brought up that it was mentioned that consumers could do something to make the process with Cornerstone go forward and is wondering what the consumer can actually do about that if it is an internal system. Johnson responded by saying that yes, it is internal and would have to be initiated by internal employees of the state.

Serván added that he himself is a consumer but also an internal employee and that any blind citizen can go to the governor. Van Zandt added that Neogov is not accessible yet is the system used by individuals applying for state jobs. Daly adds that it is against the law to purchase technology that is not blind accessible and any citizen can bring that to the governor's attention. Barbara Loos adds that as a consumer she asks to be made aware of further issue so she as a consumer can shine light on these issues and she can't know about internal issues if she is not informed about them.

New Business

Election of Board Positions

Commissioner Robert Newman moved to elect Commissioner Michael Hansen as Chairperson. Commissioner Becky Rieken seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, passing with four in favor and one abstention (Hansen).

Commissioner Michael Hansen moved to elect Commissioner Robert Newman as Vice Chairperson. Commissioner Becky Rieken seconded the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Julie Johnson moved to elect Commissioner Becky Rieken as Executive Secretary. Michael Hansen seconded the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

The commissioners were congratulated on their appointments. Commissioner Jirak thanked Julie for her service as chair and expressed his hope that Michael and Robert developed the same rapport and close personal friendship and working relationship that he and Julie had and will continue to have.

Discuss and Act on Agency Restructure

Dr. Pearl Van Zandt reports that an external consultant has come to observe and advise on how to make everything run smoother and more effectively at the Commission. In light of that observation, a proposal has been made that all client services be moved to one division in order to enhance communication and organization statewide. Independent Living tracks (IL Tracks) have changed. The roles of IL deputy has changed with it and now even more so will be changing as we see more of a need for training, human resource, and policy development at the level of deputy director.

Business manager Bill Brown expressed he feels that NCBVI Administration will be enhanced by leadership team changes; helping services, fiscal, and personnel to work well together. Some aspects of how the restructuring is described is already in motion with the leadership team working to be on the same page before communicating to staff and/or clients.

Johnson addressed a concern brought to the board by staff regarding the restructure of the technology team. Some members of the Tech Team have expressed concern about communication and effective services to consumers. It was explained that the Program Manager is still in charge of managing staff technology statewide and the Tech Team. The Tech Specialists will have direct supervisors within each local office or district. Commissioner Newman asked who would evaluate the Tech Specialists in their technology skills. The response was that Wes would serve in that capacity.

Majerus adds that in order to support the restructure, there will be a meeting between supervisors from every district to bring together all the different district supervisors and the district's VR specialist to stay on the same page with efforts and to keep up with answering questions regarding technology.

Hansen asks Majerus if those with special skills will still remain flexible to float around districts to areas where they are especially talented. Serván adds that this flexibility is and will continue to be in place and that the lines of communication are clearer now.

Brown adds that the lines of communication will become shorter with this restructure so that communication does not get distorted as it does when messages go higher and higher up the line, becoming vague and getting lost in the shuffle. Majerus adds that he will keep everyone current on expertise during consistent meetings.

Serván clarifies that with the restructure, Majerus will have more responsibilities than he did before. The thing that is changing for Majerus' position is that he will now be supervised by Serván but Dr. Pearl Van Zandt will still oversee all activities and finalize decisions.

Daly expresses that it is the executive director's right to make changes, such as this restructure. Van Zandt adds that she appreciates the support and clarifies that having the Board officially endorse the changes is a positive thing. Altman adds that in the past it was confusing figuring out whom to go to and now with the change, the chain of command is understood and communication will be that much stronger.

The board gives their unanimous support on the restructuring.

Public Comment

Van Zandt comments that we are a small group here but the public is always welcome to reach out to the board, to herself or her staff.

Barbara Loos adds that if the agency is prepared for the change they should go for it. She comments that it will be interesting seeing the change in leadership at different levels statewide. Back to guide dog policy, she reflects to the 1970's where she says there was an "us and them" mentality regarding guide dogs which never should be the case. Since the center's expertise is cane travel; that is their focus, which is as it should be considering adequate cane skills are prerequisite to deciding whether to use a guide dog user as a travel tool. Once an individual has proficient cane skills, they will have an optimal relationship with their guide dog if that becomes their travel tool of choice.

Final Announcements including next meeting date and focus topic

Commissioner Becky Rieken asks for assistance to attend the State NFB Convention. Jirak made the motion and Newman seconded and a vote was taken. Unanimously the board voted to approve the motion.

Johnson asks for assistance to attend the State NFB Convention. Commissioner Jirak moves and Newman seconded. Unanimously the board votes to approve the motion.

Jirak moved we adjourn and Hansen seconded the motion. The board voted unanimously to approve the motion to adjourn.

November 1, Omaha – Focus Topic: The collaborative process between the agency and consumer organizations to further advance independent living and employment of blind Nebraskans.

Adjourn at 2:45 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 1, 2014 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,
Stephanie Wagle, Secretary
NCBVI

Julie Johnson, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners