

**NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2014**



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INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is the State of Nebraska vocational rehabilitation agency for blind and visually impaired persons. Our mission is: Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities, and building belief in the blind.

NCBVI provides a variety of comprehensive services enabling blind people to become fully participating, contributing members of society. Blind and visually impaired people lead normal lives, work in a wide range of jobs, have families, raise children, and participate fully in community life. The major challenges facing the blind today are due to prevailing attitudes and misconceptions about blindness. NCBVI promotes greater awareness about the abilities of blind people among blind and visually impaired consumers, their families, employers, and the general public. The following programs and services provide the means, by which blind persons can obtain, regain or retain a productive role in society:

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- Technology
- Independent Living Part B (IL)
- Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB)
- Deaf-Blind
- Digital Voice Newspaper Delivery System (NFB-NEWSLINE®)
- Nebraska Business Enterprises

Three methods are used for gauging the level of client satisfaction with NCBVI services and gathering information for a needs assessment. Clients served in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) track are mailed a survey to complete four months after case closure. Clients served in the independent living (IL) track are sent a similar survey six months after case closure. To get quality feedback from our VR clients, a more comprehensive survey is conducted over the phone. The Nebraska Center for the Blind Survey is also conducted over the phone three months after training is completed. Another form of phone survey is done after completion of some of the special programs, such as transition programs and Employment Conferences. The last form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, held four times a year with the Board of Commissioners, twice a year at State conventions of consumer organizations, and other times as requested.

In 2014, The Enrichment Foundation awarded NCBVI a grant in the amount of \$10,000 in support of PILBO (Providing Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha), for blind and visually impaired adults living in Douglas and Sarpy Counties in the IL track in need of access technology and services. A renewal of the grant will start in January 2015 with \$10,000 in support of PILBO.

NCBVI obtained its full federal match enabling the capture of reallocation funds available last summer, from states unable to meet the full match for federal funds. We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds during 2014. You will find an increase in VR, OIB, and IL Part B expenditures this year which has most to do with how we are spending our Social Security Reimbursement funds. Federal regulation 34 FR 361 allows applying those funds for Independent Living (IL and OIB) programs, as well as VR. The past five years have shown significant reallocation funding of the VR program that NCBVI has been able to draw down. With that funding available, we have opted to utilize more of our Social Security Reimbursement funding to enhance our Independent Living Programs. We currently show this funding in two places, the program it was spent on and the Social Security Reimbursement funds expended.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Expenditures July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014

1. Basic Support	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 3,660,372
B. Aid	\$ 916,440
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 311,834
B. Aid	\$ 56,766
3. Supported Employment	
A. Operations	\$ 0
B. Aid	\$ 48,914
4. Independent Living Part B	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 106,859
B. Aid	\$ 52,442
5. In-Service Training Grant	
A. Operations (only)	\$ 22,298
6. PILBO	
A. Operations	\$ 5,287
B. Aid	\$ 5,500
7. Senior Blind	\$ 128,250
8. Program Income	\$ 17,721
9. Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)	
A. Operations	\$ 715,991
B. Aid	\$ 47,934

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program prepares blind and visually impaired individuals to enter, retain or advance in full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market. NCBVI provides training and placement in quality jobs that are appropriate to each individual's capabilities, abilities, potential, interests, resources, and informed choice. Some of the services that can be provided include: counseling services promoting a positive overall adjustment to blindness, training in the skills of blindness, self-advocacy, blindness support of family members and friends, elevation of personal expectations, vocational education, vocational training, job training, job development, job placement, and access technology services. During federal fiscal year 2014, nine hundred forty-two Nebraskans received services in all statuses; of these, 72 achieved competitive employment, 30 more than the previous year. NCBVI provided services 593 blind and visually impaired individuals with multiple disabilities and 156 clients aged 14 through 26. NCBVI successfully achieved performance levels required by the US Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) official Standards and Indicators.

Increasingly, persons who are visually impaired or blind also experience one or more 'secondary disabilities.' These include, but are not limited to, deaf-blindness (discussed in more detail in a later section), cognitive, mental/emotional, physical, and others. Veterans returning from active duty are much more likely to experience brain/head injuries in addition to vision loss. Persons are more likely to survive accidents or traumatic occurrences than they had been in the past. NCBVI counselors work with persons who experience a wide range of multiple disabilities. Despite the multiple disabilities, we work to enable individuals to build self-confidence and high expectations for themselves, to gain the skills of blindness and to achieve their personal goals.

NCBVI counselors reach out to businesses and public entities to raise awareness of blind and visually impaired people and their abilities. This year NCBVI invited businesses to a state-wide Employment Conference and an Open House ceremony. Power-Point presentations were used to inform employers about reasonable accommodations for the blind that will not adversely affect productivity. Blind and visually impaired consumers were placed in a variety of jobs, including: automotive technician, cashier, custodian, customer service representative, dishwasher, elementary school teacher, housekeeper, juvenile diversion program coordinator, landlord, laundry worker, massage therapist, mental health counselor, office support worker, plant and soil scientist, research surveyor, restaurant cook, science teacher, self-employed quilter, telephone surveyor, vendor, vocational rehabilitation technician, and writing coach.

Staff development is an important part of high-quality services provided to blind and visually impaired consumers. NCBVI personnel receive training on counseling skills, job development and job placement, multiple disabilities, access technology, and community resources and consumer organizations as well as other timely emerging topics.

NCBVI is committed to helping clients achieve high quality competitive employment outcomes, not just the first available job, but full-time jobs with good wages and benefits including health

insurance and opportunities for advancement. Many of the clients who achieve employment as a result of NCBVI services no longer need social security benefits or welfare.

Counseling and guidance services are available to families of blind and visually impaired people pursuing personal and vocational goals. NCBVI also endeavors to raise the level of awareness in the general public regarding blindness and the abilities of blind and visually impaired people. NCBVI counselors know that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can be fully integrated into the social and economic mainstream of society. This philosophy is disseminated through educational programs designed to reach business people/employers, educators, health care professionals, human service agencies, and other individuals and organizations impacting the lives of blind and visually impaired people.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services 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. NCBVI counselors are constantly working on building partnerships with business managers and owners to encourage the hiring of qualified blind job seekers.

Each of the three districts operated by NCBVI conduct 3-day workshops to prepare job-ready clients for a systematic search for employment opportunities, job interviews, social skills, resume writing, networking, problem-solving, and self-assertiveness.

Blind and visually impaired students and young adults often lack meaningful employment experiences and good independent living skills. The Transition Program creates opportunities for exploring career interests consistent with individual strengths, abilities, and potential and promotes greater personal independence using the alternative skills of blindness. Special programs providing employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired students and young adults help to educate employers and promote greater acceptance in the workplace. Transition services provide opportunities for clients to develop social skills, good work habits and ethics, and a work history; all contributing to eventual success in the workplace as adults.

Eight blind and visually impaired teenagers participated in WAGES (Work and Gain Experience in the Summer), a six week experience program located on the downtown University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus where they lived in a student dormitory. Following orientation to the campus and downtown Lincoln and instruction using the long white cane, WAGES students were expected to travel independently to and from work assignments using public transportation each day. Throughout the program, students increased their self-confidence and understanding of blindness by participation in weekly seminars focused on discussions of work ethics and blindness issues. Positive adult blind role models shared their lives and work experiences in a wide range of careers. The staff also worked with employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of blind employees. In addition, WAGES students participated in challenging activities including outdoor grilling, hiking, horseback riding, navigating an obstacle course, among other activities geared to developing skills and confidence.

WAGES provided a range of work experiences including animal care at the Capitol Humane Society, food service at Aging Partners, customer service at a vending operation in the State Office Building, docent at the State Capitol Building, child care at the Clyde Malone Community Center, dog grooming at Canine Design, dishwasher at Selleck Hall, and office worker at Lancaster County Records and Information Management. Six of the WAGES students participated in training in the Nebraska Center for the Blind for half the day while working at their respective work assignments the other half.

Winnerfest and Project Independence (PI) are two other transition programs coordinated by NCBVI. Blind and visually impaired teenagers from across the state participate in Winnerfest, a 3-day socialization program held twice a year. Eighteen students attended Winnerfest in March and sixteen in November. Activities were focused on the importance of participating in extra-curricular activities in high school, socialization skills, self-defense, and debunking common misconceptions about blindness. Blind children aged 6 to 14 participate in PI, a 4-day summer camp experience. The fifteen campers have the opportunity to be with other blind children and learn the alternative, non-visual skills of blindness. The theme for PI this year was, "Marching to the Beat of My Own Drum."

In 2011, a transition team consisting of representatives from NCBVI, 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 produced a protocol to promote better communications between different entities serving Blind, Visually Impaired, or Deaf-Blind Students and promote a more seamless transition to adult services. [Opening Doors: A Transition Guide](#) can be read in full at www.ncbvi.ne.gov/pdf/transition-guide.pdf. The document continues to be disseminated across the state to educational entities, early child hood agencies, consumers, and parents.

The Transition Team decided that quarterly meetings were no longer needed, so the team was disbanded. Now, emphasis is placed on collaboration directly between Commission staff, educators and parents following guidance from the protocol across the state. Commission staff members continue to be active in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln, Lancaster County and Greater Nebraska.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The NCBVI Technology Program provides technology services to blind and visually impaired clients and current and potential employers of the blind across the state. The Technology Team consists of a Technology Program Manager based in Lincoln and three Technology Specialists based in Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha. Clients are instructed in the use of access technologies such as screen access software, refreshable Braille, screen magnification, and personal note taking devices. In addition, instruction is provided in the use of mainstream technologies such as web browsing, use of smartphones, the Windows and Macintosh/Apple operating systems, and word processing skills which clients need for achieving their vocational goals.

The Technology Program provides training to NCBVI counselors and personnel in the basic operation of access technology for the blind enabling them to work with clients and complete job responsibilities more effectively. Personnel in the North Platte District participated in training on the use of iPhones and iPads. These devices are collectively known as iOS devices and are made usable by blind people through a built-in feature called VoiceOver. This is a feature that can read aloud onscreen contents, provide access to the device touch screen through specialized gestures, and output content in refreshable Braille. These features are built in by Apple at the factory with no additional purchase of software. iOS is a good example of mainstream accessibility where the manufacturer builds in features that make devices useable by blind people out of the box. Personnel in our Omaha office also completed a Windows 8 training where they learned to use Windows 8 with screen access software, JAWS for Windows. JAWS (Job Access With Speech) is software that is installed on a computer to verbalize on screen contents and provides commands for reviewing what is on screen and determining how to interact with the computer. Similar training is planned for the Lincoln district. The Technology Team and several counselors attended a "Training the Trainers" event offered by the National Federation of the Blind in Baltimore, Maryland. NCBVI personnel participating in this training learned about producing Braille documents, using Android devices, the Chrome Operating system, and use of Google's cloud-based apps such as Documents and Sheets.

The technology program manager continues to work on accessibility projects at NCBVI. Accessibility ensures that staff members who are blind can efficiently use web sites, software, and equipment necessary to complete their jobs. The Technology Program Manager has assisted the State of Nebraska with accessibility testing and remediation strategies for the Payroll and Financial Center, Employee Work Center, and the Employee Development Center. NCBVI does not have the capacity nor the responsibility to be the primary source of accessibility testing and remediation for the State of Nebraska, but does provide consultation to those projects directly touching the work of staff members and the lives of clients. All state agencies are urged to incorporate accessibility into their products at the time of procurement or development. Incorporating accessibility features into a system at the beginning of the product lifecycle ensures the applications are usable by all, and is less costly and time-consuming than retrofitting applications that are already in use.

Technology Specialists work with employers and clients to ensure that they have the resources necessary to meet the client's vocational goal, and to work with the systems used by the

business. This past year, consultations were provided to the Accountability and Disclosure Commission, Office of the CIO, Department of Administrative Services State Personnel, Department of Administrative Services Materiel Division, Appogee Retail, Columbus Public Schools, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Behavioral Health Research Center, Northeast Community College, Lincoln Public Schools, Assistive Technology Partnership, Vocational Rehabilitation, Central Community College in Hastings, Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte, University of Nebraska at Kearney, Minden Public Schools, Wilcox-Hildreth Public Schools, Veteran's Administration - VIST, St. Paul Public Schools, Grand Island Public Schools, Gibbon Public Schools, Indianola Public Schools, Chief Industries, Heartland Community Schools and Grace Children's Home in Henderson, College of St. Mary's, Kearney Public Schools, Loup County Schools, Alpha Rehab in Kearney, Fagot Electric, Goodwill, Eaton's, HyVee, Boys Town, Omaha Steaks, and Hershey Public Schools, among others. The Technology Program also provides loaner equipment to consumers and employers through the AT4All web site (<https://www.at4all.com>). This loaner equipment allows consumers to evaluate specific pieces of access technology to ensure that the technology will meet the client's needs.

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 employed. 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 scripting to make applications more accessible and to teach the use of access technology.

The Technology Program Manager and Technology Specialists engage in public relations activities to educate business people, consumers, and the general public about the capabilities of blind and visually impaired individuals who use access technology. Technology Specialists also hold memberships in the Association of Information Technology Professionals and the Greater Nebraska Workforce Investment Board.

Technology Specialists teach college-bound clients how to access textbook materials from Learning Ally, Bookshare and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Public school systems will too often provide textbooks to blind and visually impaired students instead of teaching them how to access the materials themselves. Teaching younger students to get excited about technology also mean teaching them how to do things their sighted peers are doing, such as sending text messages and using mainstream technologies including the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Some phones contain capabilities, or can be outfitted with software that verbalizes the information on the screen or allows the user to read phone output on a device called a Refreshable Braille Display. Several blind and visually impaired students are using iPads in the classroom to take notes, accessible books and other applications, and for accessing information from smart boards used by the teacher. Technology

Specialists also teach students strategies for finding information online and present methods for accessing books and content from mainstream sources.

Technology is advancing at a rapid pace. More and more mainstream software and hardware developers are including accessibility features in their products. For example, Apple provides a screen reading package called VoiceOver in all of their products. It allows blind people to read what is on the screen of their Apple device with spoken output or in Braille using a refreshable Braille display device. Google provides accessibility through the TalkBack screen reader on its Android Platform. Many NCBVI staff members use iPhones in their daily work, and each office operated by NCBVI has iPad and iPad Mini units for demonstration and evaluation. Each district has a Windows 8 laptop with Office 2013 to allow Technology Specialists and clients to work with this new productivity suite and operating system. Technology Specialists will do as much as possible to expose themselves to these products to ensure they can provide the best services to their clients. Over the coming year, Technology Specialists will continue to work with Windows 8, Mac OS, iOS, and other emerging technologies to ensure that they are equipped to assist clients of NCBVI.

THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the Blind is a six to nine month comprehensive training program for blind and visually impaired adults. Training in the alternative skills of blindness is provided in such areas as use of the long white cane, Braille, computers and other access technology, basic woodworking and home repair, home management and activities of daily living, community usage, apartment living, and career exploration and vocational development. Center students completing the program have the skills needed for success in the world of work and full participation in everyday life.

Center students receive their initial training in the alternative skills of blindness at home before they come to the Center. They must have a visual impairment severe enough to disrupt the normal conduct of everyday life and be able to participate in a full-time, intensive training program. Interested clients in need of more comprehensive, intensive training come in for a tour of the Center, followed by a subsequent three-day stay. During the three-day stay, clients are mentored by senior Center students and receive training under sleepshades to give them a more realistic Center training experience. They then make an informed choice on whether or not to go ahead with Center training based on this experience with assistance from Field and Center counselors. Clients choosing to attend the Center are fully aware that training involves eight hours a day, five days per week, for up to nine months. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the clients who come for a three-day stay decide to come back for the full course of training.

Center students live in individual, furnished, efficiency apartments located in downtown Lincoln. NCBVI support of Center students includes the cost of training materials, rent, utilities, local telephone service, transportation expenses, grocery and activity costs. Center students are responsible for 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 cost of a shop project exceeding the budgeted amount. Center students commute daily between the apartments and the Center by city bus.

Blind and visually impaired people are assumed to have the ability to solve problems independently without help from others. The model of instruction practiced at the Nebraska Center for the Blind based on this assumption is "Structured Discovery." This approach introduces the student to a series of experiences, ranging from the simple to the complex, requiring the processing of information to come up with solutions to problems caused by blindness. Students with some functional vision wear sleepshades to focus on the development of non-visual techniques and eliminate the natural tendency to rely on inadequate vision, thereby building confidence in non-visual techniques. Once the cycle of dependence on inadequate vision has been overcome and the students have learned to truly rely upon alternative skills, they are better able to make informed decisions regarding when to use visual or non-visual skills.

Throughout the week, students are scheduled for two hours of instruction in each of five skill areas: travel using a long white cane, home management, woodworking shop, braille instruction, and computer operation and use of other access devices for the blind. Two hours is

set aside during the week for a group seminar focused on issues related to blindness and another two hours for a vocational seminar. Center students also meet with a Center instructor assigned to work with them for two hours once a week on more personal goals and objectives.

The development of a more positive overall understanding of and adjustment to blindness is a primary objective of Center training. Participation in group seminars focused on challenging deeply-held attitudes and beliefs regarding blindness and the capabilities of blind people promote a more positive overall personal adjustment to blindness. With more self-confidence, belief in themselves as blind people, and training in the alternative skills of blindness, graduates of Center training are able to pursue personal vocational and independent living goals and a more meaningful place in society.

In the course of encountering both classroom and real world experiences, students are not only challenged to expand their own levels of functional competency, but they also have the opportunity to learn firsthand more effective interaction with the sighted public. This provides clients with the opportunity to develop the insights and confidence necessary to effectively respond to prevailing societal attitudes, discrimination, and low expectations.

Center students participate in a wide range of activities, either in the Center itself or in the larger community, encouraging greater personal independence and access to the world around them using the skills of blindness. Past activities have included attendance at Legislative meetings, public hearings, banquet, state and national consumer conventions, county fairs, fishing, art shows, senior conferences, college and employment workshops, movie activities featuring video description, engaging in traditional holiday events, and community service projects and other volunteer efforts. Up to four activities are scheduled each month. A total of eighteen activities were held during the year.

The Center Apartment Resource Counselor coordinates activities three evenings a week and every other weekend. Evening and weekend activities are optional and do not require the use of sleepshades. 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.

The Nebraska Center for the Blind engages in an ongoing program 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 greater awareness of the capabilities of blind people. Visitors have included state legislators and government officials, students from public and private schools and colleges, vision teachers from public and private schools, personnel from other governmental agencies, employers, and other visitors representing the general public.

Over the last five years, the Nebraska Center for the Blind has averaged ten students at any given time. During calendar year 2014, the Center served thirteen students; there was no waiting list.

All newly hired counselors and management personnel go through Center training for a period of 600 hours – eight hours a day, five days a week, using sleepshades if the employee has any functional sight. This approach to new staff training promotes a deeper understanding of blindness and a stronger belief in the alternative skills of blindness enabling blind people to compete on terms of equality with the sighted and achieve greater personal independence. During this calendar year, the Center provided training to three new counselors.

The Center provided training to six WAGES (Work and Gain Experience in the Summer) students. Training was also provided to 99 Bryan Nursing students, as a part of their community experiences. In addition, we had 16 three day stays. The Center conducted 37 tours. The Center continues to assist Nebraska Business Enterprises staff in evaluating prospective candidates interested in a career in food service.

INDEPENDENT LIVING/OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND PROGRAM

The Independent Living (IL) Program serves blind and visually impaired individuals under the age of 55. The Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program serves blind and visually impaired individuals age 55 years of age and older if they do not have a vocational goal (those who do have vocational goals, are served under the VR Program). The IL/OIB Program serves blind and visually impaired individuals with independent living rather than vocational goals. IL/OIB clients receive training and services to continue living fulfilling lives with dignity and independence.

During federal fiscal year 2014, 549 IL/OIB clients received active independent living services. Four hundred eighteen (418) clients were 55 and over (OIB program) while 131 were under 55 years of age (IL program); 51 were between the ages of 5 and 19 and two were under 5 years of age.

Blind and visually impaired clients 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.

Seven Independent Living-Older Blind Orientation Teachers and a Program Specialist 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. Orientation teachers also provide instruction in the use of NFB-NEWSLINE[®] (a digital voice newspaper service accessed by phone and internet), 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. Access 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. NCBVI staff members help coordinate services among other providers including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, offices of the Area Agencies on Aging, Centers for Independent Living, Veterans Administration, and other service agencies.

Each of the three NCBVI districts have offered group independent living skills training; Senior Adventures in Independent Living (SAIL) in the Omaha district, Group Alternative Techniques

Experiences (GATE) in the Lincoln district, and For Your Independence (FYI) in the North Platte district.

Clients gain confidence in their ability to use the skills they've learned in a setting away from home. Training during these programs 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 promote use of community resources to effectively conduct the activities of daily living such as shopping, engaging in recreational options, keeping medical and other important appointments, and so on.

DEAF-BLIND PROGRAM

The Deaf-Blind Program was established in 2000 with a grant awarded by the Helen Keller National Center. 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 413; two hundred seventeen female and one hundred ninety-six male. NCBVI's deaf-blind program provides services enabling Deaf-Blind consumers to live full and productive lives with dignity and self-respect. The deaf-blind program promotes full participation in society for Deaf-Blind people through use of community resources, alternative skills of blindness, augmentative devices for the deaf and other access technologies for people with disabilities, communication strategies such as American Sign Language, and education of the general public. In addition, assistance is provided to individuals with dual sensory loss giving them greater access to other services related to all aspects of employment, education, and independent living.

Other services provided include coordination and facilitation of a peer support group for Deaf-Blind consumers (Hand-In-Hand); demonstration and assessment of augmentative technology for Deaf-Blind consumers; development of inter-agency agreements or procedures to facilitate the coordination of services to Deaf-Blind consumers; development, coordination, and implementation of training workshops promoting professional and community awareness of deaf-blindness; development, coordination, and implementation of training workshops for sign language interpreters working for and through the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing; and serving as a resource to NCBVI counselors and other agencies serving Deaf-Blind consumers.

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska sixteen years ago with the help of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and continues to grow. This program is an audio information system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers, and a variety of other publications and magazines. Currently, there 415 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 328 newspapers, including six Nebraska-based newspapers, nine national papers, fourteen international papers, five Spanish publications, twelve breaking news publications, and forty-two magazines; all accessible by touch-tone telephone, computer, or through Apple devices. Also available are weekly store circulars, TV listings, and job listings. The system 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 1,781 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 developing 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 without having to be connected to a telephone.

Anyone who cannot read conventional newsprint qualifies for NFB-Newsline®. NFB-Newsline® contributes to a more literate blind population able to understand and master the printed word through better access to daily newspapers and magazines. Because of NFB-Newsline® blind and visually impaired job seekers are better able to compete for available jobs through greater access through local newspapers. Blind and visually impaired children are able to conduct their own research assignments and complete their homework independently.

Many seniors experiencing vision loss are able to resume reading local newspapers and stay actively connected with community affairs. NFB-Newsline[®] makes it possible for hundreds of blind and print-impaired Nebraskans to address the compelling need for information, thus affording them the opportunity to become more independent and productive members of society. NFB-Newsline[®] is the only service that makes so much information available to so many qualified subscribers.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

NCBVI staff members provide ongoing information and referral services to agencies and organizations of interest to blind and visually impaired consumers. Some of these agencies and organizations are:

Nebraska Talking Book and Braille Services (TBBS) is the State Library Service for the Blind and Reading Impaired. NCBVI counselors assist with applications for TBBS services and provide instruction in the operation of equipment for reading materials on audio cartridges.

NCBVI counselors routinely refer clients to the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska and the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska. These consumer organizations of the blind provide important opportunities for blind people to network with and learn from each other, giving them the encouragement and support needed for success. Long after the vocational rehabilitation experience is over, these consumer organizations continue to provide that extra support. When a person becomes blind or even grows up blind, it is very important to associate with other blind people to get the proper understanding about the capabilities of blind people. It is through this association with positive blind role models provided by consumer organizations of the blind that people struggling with vision loss are able to make a more positive overall adjustment to blindness and develop self-confidence.

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; it is also now available via the internet. 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 blind people experience. RTBN makes it possible for blind people to stay in touch with their community and what is going on around them. NCBVI counselors assist consumers with RTBN applications and provide instruction in the operation of RTBN equipment.

The American Council of the Blind coordinates subsidized half-fare taxi coupon programs for blind and visually impaired consumers living in the Omaha ("Give a Lift") and Lincoln ("Share a Fare") metropolitan areas. NCBVI counselors routinely inform potential beneficiaries to these programs and assist with the application process, if needed.

Blind and visually impaired consumers with functional vision may be referred to the University of Nebraska-Omaha Low Vision Clinic for a low vision evaluation. Financial assistance may be available if low vision devices are recommended promoting greater independence in the home or on the job.

NEBRASKA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (NBE)

NBE provides opportunities for legally blind individuals to manage their own small businesses in vending facilities and/or cafeterias located within federal, state, and local governmental buildings and other vending sites. NCBVI's support of NBE entrepreneurs across the state includes two (2) staff members, all equipment, supplies, initial stock, on-going training, equipment repair, assistance in skill areas essential for business management, and continuous follow-up. NBE promotes greater public awareness of the capabilities of blind people and broader employment opportunities for the blind.

In accordance with the Randolph-Sheppard Act, vendors make monthly payments of "Set Aside" to the agency. This covers a portion of the management services provided and for new equipment, repairs, and support needed to keep the Vendors fully and efficiently operating.

There are fifteen licensed vendors and one vendor in training currently running vending facilities. NBE vendors manage over 95 sites and run three cafeterias, maintaining more than 300 machines in federal, state and local buildings. This also includes all 20 rest areas on Interstate 80 across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on many new vending opportunities with the Department of Agriculture, Immigration, and two new TSA locations.

In 2014, there were 85 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending or food service in Nebraska managed by NBE. Some of the locations of the NBE vending facilities are as follows:

Five break rooms, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
INS, 1717 Avenue H, Omaha
FBI, S. 120th St, Omaha
Five break rooms, Zorinski Federal Building, 1616 Capital Ave, Omaha
Federal Court House, 18th and Dodge, Omaha
Parks Service Headquarters, 700 Riverfront Drive, Omaha
City County Building, 19th Farnam, Omaha
Social Security, No. 90th, Omaha
Voc. Rehab. 120th and Q, Omaha
County Courthouse, 18th and Farnam, Omaha
700 'R' Street, Lincoln, (Main Post Office) Lincoln
INS, 850 'S' Street, Lincoln
Veterans Administration, 3800 Old Cheney, Lincoln
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Homeland Security, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE
Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Taste of Lincoln Café in the State Office Building at 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
Denney Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
New state property at 1526 K Street, Lincoln
Grand Island Federal Building, West Second Street, Grand Island
Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island

Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
 Nebraska State Patrol Training Academy, Grand Island
 Craft state office building, North Platte
 All 20 rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Sidney on Interstate 80
 UPS Distribution Center, Hwy 385, Sidney
 Progress Rail Repair Center, Sidney
 Main Post Office, 2510 S. 11th, Kearney
 Wilson's Truck Repair, Hwy 30, Grand Island
 DuVal Diesel Service, Shady Bend Road, Grand Island
 Camp Ashland Military Dining Facility, Hwy 6, Ashland
 Greenleif National Guard Training Center, East 'J', Hastings
 Hastings Main Post Office, 300 N. Kansas Street
 Fremont Main Post Office, 348 E. 6th Street
 Norfolk Main Post Office, N. 4th Street
 Five Lincoln Post Office annexes
 Joint Forces Headquarters, National Guard Lincoln, vending and the New Café

The program continues to grow, and blind entrepreneurs are earning higher annual income as more vending sites are developed across the state. New routes are being developed in Nebraska City and the North Platte district. A new Vendor in Omaha started operations this year, and fourteen new postal locations in Omaha, a military processing center in Omaha, and the new National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters in Lincoln became operational.

All prospective vendors are assessed to determine the skills they need to acquire, such as basic math, basic accounting, writing, techniques of blindness, and customer service. Vendors have passed an adult basic education test and a background check.

Business skills are developed by taking courses at Nebraska's Community Colleges relating to areas such 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. Annual Training sessions were provided by the NBE staff for vendors in September, 2014.

NBE STATISTICS

<u>Gross Sales</u>	<u>Set Aside</u>
\$1,987,868.00	\$37,694.00