

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Public Meeting  
Saturday, July 23, 2016  
Hampton Inn, 200 Oasis Pkwy  
North Platte, NE

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

Mike Hansen, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. and he welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Commissioners present: Mike Hansen, Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Mark Bulger, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City; Chad Bell, Alliance.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Carlos Servan, Deputy Director VR; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director HR; Wes Majerus, Program Manager Technology; all from Lincoln. Erin Brandyberry, North Platte District Supervisor, Kearney. Fritz Nuffer, VR Counselor; Diann Vargas, Orientation Counselor; from North Platte. Jan Brandt, Program Specialist, Technology; and Adrienne Moody, VR Technician; both Kearney.

Public Present: Dan Bird, Meeting Recorder, Omaha; Jim Jirak, ACB, Omaha

It was noted that public comments are always welcome. Dan Bird recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website. Lunch will be delivered from Jimmy Johns.

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 the May 7th public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the May 7, 2016 Commission Meeting. Commissioners Hansen and Bell seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

Focus Topic – Technology Trends and Apps.

Presenters: Wes Majerus and Jan Brandt

**Trends in Technology and Apps**

## **Connected Devices through Smart Phones and the Internet**

Smartphones and tablets offer accessibility through their built-in screen access packages like VoiceOver, Talkback, or VoiceView. This provides blind persons with data access through apps, documents, and the web. However, they can also allow access to data through connected devices. Fitness trackers and other medical devices can provide access to heart rate, steps, blood sugar, blood pressure, and other health information through companion apps. Other devices in the home can also be controlled by internet-capable devices such as companion apps for kitchen appliances, washing machines, thermostats, life safety systems, etc. This may bridge some of the accessibility barriers caused by touch screens and inaccessible device control panels if the apps that control the devices can be used nonvisually. Some inaccessible machines that exist in public places allow interface through an app to control them. For example, Coca-Cola's Freestyle machine allows smart phone users to control the drink selections on the machine by scanning a QR code on the machine and then using the app to make selections. Unfortunately, the app is inaccessible, but the potential is there for future use if accessibility functionality can be incorporated in a future update. Apps have also revolutionized transit planning, obtaining transportation through ride sharing services, and reading printed documents.

## **Mainstream Device Accessibility**

More and more manufacturers are incorporating accessibility features into their products at the factory. Apple's Macintosh computers have had Voiceover since 2007 and Apple's iPhone became the first touch screen device to be completely accessible out of the box with no additional software in 2009. Apple has expanded VoiceOver to all of their products including Apple Watch, AppleTV, and they have continually added features to iOS and macOS's versions of the screen reader.

Google's Android and Chromebook devices also include accessibility. While not as robust, in my opinion, as Apple's accessibility solutions, the products are usable out of the box. Amazon's Kindle FireOS is what is known in the industry as a "fork" of android. In other words, it is Android code that Amazon has taken and modified to suit their purposes. Recently, Amazon has made available a screen access package called VoiceView that runs on all Kindle FireOS devices. It is built-in and can be invoked with a standard keystroke and gesture. Although it doesn't contain Braille support by default, you can download the Google BrailleBack application from the Amazon Kindle store. The Kindle devices range from \$39.99 to \$200. The implication of this is that someone with low income or limited means could have a low-cost tablet. Because NLS BARD or NFB Newline's Android app can be placed on the device, the user can have an inexpensive reading solution. Some public libraries have ways to check out eBooks and audio titles on the Kindle. Because of contractual concerns for purchasing items through the State of Nebraska, we haven't seen these devices, but the scenarios described previously have been discussed on podcasts and elsewhere. Because the new accessibility solutions have only been available since March, we don't yet know what is possible. Amazon's FireTV, a box that allows access to Amazon video streaming and other services, has also been recently made accessible. With the VoiceView screen reader being in its infancy, it will be intriguing to see where the accessibility of the products goes from here.

## **Mergers and Acquisitions in the AT field**

From the beginning, the AT industry has been a small market industry. Small and resourceful staffs researched, developed, and produced hardware and software. This is, in large part, why access technology costs as much as it does; the costs of research, development, and production cannot be spread over economies of scale as they can for mainstream devices like TV's and computers. With the advent of the devices and software described earlier, AT vendors are having to innovate. In some cases, this means mergers and acquisitions are occurring. The largest AT vendor at this time is the VFO group. Initially, Vector Capital purchased Freedom Scientific and Optelec. AI Squared, makers of ZoomText purchased GW Micro, makers of Window-Eyes. Recently, VFO purchased the newly-merged AI Squared, causing the two most popular screen readers and the two most popular magnification packages to all be under the same umbrella. With all of the mergers and acquisitions, it remains to be seen what the product landscape and the functions in each product will look like down the line.

## **Specialized devices that use mainstream software**

In 2002, Freedom Scientific unveiled the Pac Mate, a note taking device that operated on Windows Mobile and allowed access to mainstream software through a special version of JAWS for Windows. Although Humanware's BrailleNote ran Windows CE a couple years prior, the end user wasn't exposed to the operating system as Keysoft, the software that drives the BrailleNote, manages all functionality and operates in a closed menu driven way. Because the PAC Mate allowed use of the operating system running on the device, one could use the standard Microsoft Office suite and download Windows Mobile Apps to see if they were accessible. This trend is now being renewed with two products being unveiled this year. Recently, Humanware released its BrailleNote Touch, which is the first ever Google-certified Braille tablet. This means that the device can run its native apps that were developed by Humanware, but it can also access the Google Play store to download any apps therein. It was just revealed that KNFB Reader would ship with all BrailleNote touch units, and any units that have already been purchased will receive an update that provides the Reader free. Because the Touch runs Android, it can do some mainstream tasks, and can interface with systems and email platforms like Microsoft Exchange. The caveat is that the apps must adhere to Google's accessibility guidelines in order to work accessibly with the tablet. If the app doesn't have accessibility coded in, the BrailleNote Touch won't automatically make it accessible.

Another device is manufactured in Russia and will be available from Freedom Scientific shortly. This is the EIBraille. It should be noted that this device may be sold under another name once Freedom Scientific begins selling it here in the US. This device features a Freedom Scientific Focus 14 Blue and a small computer unit merged together in a case. This package is based on Windows 10 and the most recent version of JAWS. An interesting fact is that if you already own any part of this package, i.e. JAWS or a Focus 14, you can save funds by just buying the pieces you need. Also, when the unit is upgraded, you will only need to buy those parts that fail or need refreshing such as a JAWS SMA or a new more powerful computer unit in the future.

## **National Braille Press B2G**

This notetaker with optional smart phone has many features. It is an Android-based operating system, with many apps (calendar, calculator, camera, clock, compass, editor, email, file management, etc.). In addition, the B2G will also work with BARD mobile, Kindle, Twitter, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn, TuneIn Radio, and any apps from the Google Play Store. It has a 20-cell, 8-dot refreshable braille display with cursor routing. The price for the base unit is \$2,495.

### **Orbit Reader 20 Braille Display (Purported to be for sale by late Fall 2016 market)**

This product is a braille reading devices. It has no Wi-Fi, but it does have notetaking functionality with a 20-cell, 8-dot display. The Orbit Reader 20 weighs less than a pound, and the battery life is currently listed as one day. There are no routing buttons. The refresh rate of the braille is slower than fuller-featured displays. The Orbit Reader 20 device is meant for reading documents from USB drives or SD cards. It can also connect to other devices, such as a computer, through Bluetooth. Its purpose is to get braille into the hands of more users. When the device is available for purchase, the American Printing House for the Blind will be the retail distributor. The estimated cost for the Orbit Reader 20 will be \$500, a fraction of most braille devices.

### **Apps for everything; the days of discs are over**

In the past, when you needed software to solve a problem, you went to the local computer store or browsed their mail-order catalog and looked at what was available, networked with other professionals in the field, or searched online. The last two options are still relevant to a degree; however, physical boxed copies of software are almost nonexistent. What this means is that software is purchased to be tied to a specific user or organization through an ID or other authentication method. This can make things challenging for State government and rehab agencies. Many of the state contracts haven't caught up with this revolution and so vehicles for obtaining new types of software sales like Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions, in-app purchases to unlock features of an otherwise-free application, or subscriptions to obtain books or other content can be problematic. This is partially solved with Apple's Volume Purchasing Program. This allows the purchase of applications from 1 to multiple copies. This is how we were able to purchase apps in bulk for distribution to our reBoot Camp transition program in the summer of 2016. This does not, however, solve the issue for android devices or provide a means for buying features of an application that are unlocked through an in-app purchase. For example, the software developer may make an app free from the app store for a certain amount of time, but then a button inside the app will be used to purchase the app to unlock it for further use. In one popular app (Voice Dream Reader) you can buy enhanced voices for reading content, but it can only be done from within the application once it is installed.

### **The Personal Computer isn't everything anymore**

Up until now, the personal computer, be it a Macintosh or a Windows-based desktop or notebook has been the focal point of the computing platforms of home or business users. With the development of various device types, this is no longer proving to be the case. This is especially true for users in their personal lives. More and more people are relying on their mobile devices to perform tasks that they used to complete on their PC in their daily lives. Many businesses still have personal computers, but some industries are adopting tablets for mobile sales and other applications. Tablets are becoming ever more mainstreamed. How does the rehab program adapt to the shifting

paradigm? What devices do we experiment with and how do we figure out what the new landscape should look like without sacrificing our philosophy or failing to provide the technology that the client actually needs at work or to learn to become employed? Do we continue to buy specialized notetakers or do we ask our clients to move toward smart displays and mainstream tablets like the iPad? Is the move toward tablets and portable computing just in the personal realm or is it also occurring in the business world as well? What are the implications of such movements for blind clients? We are all attempting to figure this out as we move forward.

### **Difficulties in Purchasing**

Much of the work that the Technology Program Manager position has been involved with as of late has been finding new technologies at the request of various Commission departments or to meet needs that have arisen. Due to the recent audit within NCBVI, we have been asked to adhere to State Purchasing Bureau issued contracts as much as possible, even for client purchases. This can cause delays in finding hardware and software products that we know we want, and can in some cases make it impossible to experiment with new items that we don't yet understand the usefulness of. As an example, the Training Center would like to have a wifi-only Android-based device to allow instructors to experiment with Android to show it to clients and to better assist the large number of clients who come to the Center with Android phones in their use. None of the contracted technology vendors sell Android devices direct to a consumer. The closest we came was Samsung, which makes devices but won't sell to agencies on the contract. This will be a concern as devices and software packages evolve and new paradigms come about.

Jan discussed NVDA as being a useful free screen reader. Commissioner Hansen asked if internet was required to use the screen reader. Wes explained that internet is only required to download the screen reader.

Commissioner Newman asked if there was someone keeping track of the assistive technological advancements made outside the United States. Jan stated that Wes uses Twitter to keep updated on overseas technological advancements. Wes stated that he also listens to Podcasts to get information about new technologies. Wes explained he spends most of his time keeping up-to-date on what is going on in the US market because the market is rapidly changing.

Commissioner Hansen asked if there is a configurable option on braille devices so the user could alternate between UEB (Unified English Braille) and other braille codes. Wes stated that most screen readers, notetakers, and software in mainstream devices have settings to switch Braille codes. The default setting varies by device. For example, Apple switched to UEB two years ago by default so users got an early exposure after updating their software. Commissioner Hansen asked if there was a way to switch back and forth, and Wes replied there was a way.

Commissioner Rieken asked if the Braille Note Touch would include Nemeth code capabilities. Jan replied there would be a new version that would be coming out that would include the Nemeth code Tutorial. This version would also enable the built-in camera and include an update that would add the KNFB reader to existing devices. New devices would ship with these options by default.

Commissioner Newman asked how to use the KNFB reader on a computer, and if a camera would be required to use the KNFB reader on a computer. Wes replied that a USB camera would likely be used. He explained that it is too early in the development cycle to know what is exactly needed to use the KNFB reader on the computer. Wes discussed the Microsoft Surface Pro and that it was the device demonstrating the Windows version of the KNFB Reader at the NFB National Convention earlier in the summer. He stated that because this device already has integrated cameras, because it is a tablet, these integrated cameras would take the picture.

Jan discussed wearable technologies that were not included in the report. OrCam is a camera that faces forward that uses a bone conduction speaker to describe the environment it sees to the wearer. Bone Conduction transmits sound directly into the cheekbone so as not to hinder the user's normal hearing of their surroundings. OrCam is said to be able to recognize faces. Jan observed that the OrCam has some difficulties reading in fairly well-lit locations. The Aira glasses have users subscribe to plans and the glasses become a camera for a remote person to describe the environment around the wearer. It is like having a personal reader. The product is still under development and is said to be helpful in scenarios such as navigating an airport or shopping mall.

Commissioner Newman asked if there are any major changes to how Wes and Jan spend their days working at the Commission. Jan answered that she generally only sees IL clients a couple of times which is normally spent on teaching techniques in using an iPad, using NFB Newline, and reading emails. She works with Pre-ETS and VR clients on a regular basis. She tries to vary her teaching in home and school setting so the educators can also learn the alternative technology. Wes answered that his day is normally spent handling staff technology issues and IT planning.

Commissioner Hansen asked about the usage of PCs and Macs by the Commission. Jan answered that they are open to teaching both PCs and Macs as it depends on the history of the client and what their preferences are. Commissioner Hansen also asked if more PCs were taught over Macs. Jan answered yes as more businesses use PCs.

Commissioner Hansen asked about the WebAIM Screen Reader User Survey. Jan said the report showcased popular screen readers, browsers, and what computers individuals were using. She discussed how iPhone usage was higher in the blind community over Android phones due to their accessibility, but overall Android usage in the US is larger than Apple's. Jan said that WebAIM completes this survey around once every 18 months, so we may be receiving a new one soon.

Commissioner Hansen asked about Chromebooks and their accessibility. Jan explained they were difficult to use. Wes stated that the Commission does not use them frequently. The Omaha Public School district gave Surface tablets to their students to use. Lincoln Public Schools provided all students fifth grade and up with Chromebooks. Commissioner Hansen asked about the option for students who had issues with Chromebooks to be given an iPad instead. Wes had not heard of that, and explained that he knew children under fifth grade in Lincoln would be given a tablet, but he thought it was Android-based. Jan explained that training would be necessary

for staff to teach clients on Chromebook accessibility. There is a free training at the NFB Jernigan Institute later in the year for Google-based devices including Chromebooks.

### Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Hansen reported that he was working with the audit committee to review financials. He has also been corresponding with the Executive Director of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He has had conference calls and an in-person meeting with a commissioner and the business manager to learn how they manage their financials. Hansen has also finished the review process of the NCBVI Executive Director for the year. He has been corresponding with Dr. Van Zandt and Wes to find better ways for file sharing. Commissioner Hansen has been creating a reference guide for the Commissioners Board.

Commissioner Rieken attended reBoot Camp, and enjoyed how the program brought together teachers, parents, and clients to learn about technology. She was able to attend the NFB National Convention where she talked to students and parents about the opportunity. She attended the NOPBC (National Organization of Parents of Blind Children) meeting where they stressed that blind children need to have the same expectations to complete the same homework as their sighted peers. She had the opportunity to tour the Kearney office as well as the North Platte office, and went to the Deaf-Blind Institute to learn about active learning which is similar to structured discovery.

Commissioner Bulger reported that he attended ACBN and met with the WAGES participants. He discussed with Dr. Van Zandt and Bob about consumer groups with regard to the impact of the WIOA Act on funding for independent living services.

Commissioner Newman reported that he attended the NFB National Convention on his own, and had the opportunity to interact with WAGES students and their parents.

Commissioner Bell reported that he is still working with the Friends of the Commission to help individuals with case specific items that the Commission is unable to cover. The group is working towards a mission statement. The group has decided to fund t-shirts for the PI program. He has been working with Commissioner Hansen, Bill Brown, and Dr. Van Zandt on the audit so the next audit is better.

### Report from the Executive Director

#### Activities and efforts since May 2016:

Weekly meetings with Leadership Team on many issues

Attended graduations of newly hired staff members from Center Training

Admin Team meetings every four to six weeks

Continued attending WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act) Core Partners Meetings with Nebraska Department of Labor, Education/Voc Rehab, Unemployment, and Adult Education colleagues. Now meetings are with Nebraska Partner Council, an expansion of the core partners with other players in the WIOA work.

Attended Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee for Lincoln/Lancaster County  
The Client Management System (CMS) is still in process; now working with State Purchasing for a solution.

Lincoln offices projects are moving along – painting and carpeting is being done in the offices of Lincoln District and the Center. It's a huge amount of work, staff are either working from home or in other parts of the building. Everyone has pitched in, worked hard, kept flexibility and good attitudes.

The Kearney Open House Ribbon Cutting is scheduled for Friday August 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:30. I plan a road trip that week, to visit the staff and offices in Scottsbluff, North Platte and Kearney.

Worked with State Risk Management on insurance issues for the vending operations, including a food trailer we are trying to get started.

Met with representatives from the Omaha Tribe, to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between NCBVI and their newly funded vocational rehabilitation program

Completed the Audit responses to the Attestation Report. Began work on strategies to address each specific finding or recommendation.

Completed revisions to the WIOA State Plan/NCBVI portion, per requirements from federal reviewers

Attended Center graduations of staff trainees and clients

Working with the Leadership Team to develop the Biennium Budget Proposal for the next two years

Worked on proposals for catering and vending opportunities at Department of Roads Headquarters. The catering work began July 7<sup>th</sup>, similar to the Lincoln State Office Building cafeteria. Vending is set to start in August.

Reached out to ACB-N and NFB-N, as well as the Centers for Independent Living (IL), to discuss IL services which will be negatively impacted by WIOA. Starting October 1, 2016, NCBVI will not receive any Part B funds.

Participated in meetings at Administrative Services about potential "eProcurement"

We brought the consultants to NCBVI for follow-up discussions about accessibility and related issues.

Met with Department of Labor about the Workforce Data Quality Initiative – Data Warehouse. We are identifying our data elements that would fit into the project. It will enable us to better share data with other WIOA partners, with confidentiality assured, for mutual assessments of achievements, etc.

Attended the quarterly meeting of the Blind Licensee's Committee in Kearney

Worked with Deputy Attorney General regarding our contracts – to improve our templates and to develop a process for following Auditor's recommendation on legal review of contracts. We have received permission to work directly with a private firm, appointed to us by the State Attorney General. The attorney will help us refine and improve our contracts and processes.

Held second interview for candidate for our Business Manager II position. The person took another position and we have reopened it.

Sent the notice to all staff and received nominations for the Governor's Employee and Supervisor of the Year. The awards are given in a ceremony in October. NCBVI Employee of the Year is John Schmitt, VR Counselor in Norfolk. NCBVI Supervisor of the Year is Carol Jenkins, Center Supervisor in Lincoln.

Served on the interview team for new CAP Director. We offered the position to Shari Bahensky, who has headed Hotline for Disabilities for years and has served as Interim CAP Director for the past month.

Attended the ACB and NFB National Conventions, spending two and a half days at each

Began a project with Voc Rehab and the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to educate employers in Lincoln about hiring people with disabilities

Provided information requested about services availability in Arizona, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Nebraska. I receive phone calls and emails from many places asking for information.

Attended Supervisors Meetings

Continuing to explore a file transfer system for Commissioners

Attended monthly NCSAB Executive Committee Meetings by conference calls

#### Service Statistics from Julie Buren

During the first three quarters of Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (October 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016), we served 751 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Of the 417 available for VR action, forty-three (43) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Sixty-four (64) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, transfers to another agency, unable to locate, incarcerated, and other). Two (2) clients were closed before a Plan for Employment was developed.

In the Independent Living (IL) track, 561 clients were served, in all statuses. Of 459 Active clients, two hundred seven (207) were closed successfully achieving their goals; twenty-two (22) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons).

#### Nebraska Center for the Blind by Carol Jenkins

5/7/2016-7/23/2016

There are seven students plus a staff trainee in the Center now. The first week of March another staff trainee will start. Two more clients will start in August.

1 New Client

1 New Staff Trainee (WAGES Counselor)

3 Three Day Stays

1 Student and 1 Staff Trainee had a Commencement Meal

2 Students had Mini Meals

Tours: Nebraska Corrections and one consumer

Activities: Budgeting Activity, participated in the Non-Visual Training in Omaha as mentors as the quarterly volunteering activity, and Descriptive Movie and Lunch. Some of the Center Students are also volunteering to help out with the WAGES program for the Skills Training portion.

Some Center Staff Attended: Easter Seals Training as well as participated in ReBoot Camp, WAGES, Camp Abilities with teaching One Touch Self Defense, and attending the NFB National Convention.

Center Supervisor: Completed Leadership Lincoln Executive Series, continues to speak to all NCBVI districts on Center changes and updates, and will start her Master's Program in Public Administration on August 22, 2016.

Additional Notes: Jeremy Richey has completed his 600 hours of sleep shade training and has begun his duties as the Home Management Instructor. Matt Hackert will finish his 600 hours of sleep shade training at approximately the end of August. Matt Hackert was on paternity leave due to his 3<sup>rd</sup> child be born on June 8, 2016. Her name is Evelyn Jo.

Lisa Kelly from Outlook Nebraska came and demonstrated the eSight glasses to the Center students and staff.

The BELL program came and spent a day at the Center with the Center Students being mentors and role models.

All of the Center Staff also put in a large number of hours on creating, planning, developing, and assembling, the WAGES Skills Training Curriculum for the whole WAGES program.

The Center has started getting new paint and carpet as a part of the agency's remodeling project. This will continue over the summer with some projects going to the end of the year.

Lincoln District Activity Report July 14, 2016 by Connie Daly

We hired Stephanie Wagle as our new transition counselor. We are very excited about what she will bring as a counselor. She was already providing some training to our transition clients in her role as a VR tech. She is working the WAGES program full-time this summer and then she will be involved with PI. She will start Center training on August 1<sup>st</sup>. We are screening applications for the VR tech position. This position will be part time.

We received training from Easter Seals on Transition Benefits, Work Incentives, Pass plans and Nebraska Benefits. We are starting to make referrals to them. We also had training from NBE and had a demonstration of eSight glasses.

Like most everyone else in the agency, we have been very busy with summer programs. Nancy was part of the team that developed and provided the ReBoot technology workshop. We helped with orientation of the students the first week of WAGES. We assisted in the hotel arrangements for the second Blind and Socially Savvy and we arranged the participants for four networking events that were associated with it. These events were awesome to be involved in. The networkers that came were very impressed by the students that they met. The training really gave the participants the confidence and skills that they needed to set themselves apart from the competition. We were also responsible for one week of skills training to the Wages students and Cheryl, Stephanie and I were chaperones during convention. I really appreciate the efforts of every single person on my team to provide support for these programs while continuing to respond to client's needs.

The Brown Bag and Braille class was suspended for the summer due to Wages and other programs. The participants of that class were very committed to improving their skills. Amy and Nancy will start the sessions again in the fall.

We completed the last ReBoot job class in June. It has been very successful in assisting clients to get the skills and confidence that they need to obtain employment. Eric will have start a new class in the fall.

Eric continues to manage our efforts in Social Media and redeveloping the website. We made some changes to our agency brochure.

Amy Buresh and Stephanie Wagle were accepted into Project ALL training. The training is provided by Leadership Lincoln. It focuses on leadership skills and learning about issues related to the community.

We moved out of our offices this week so that painting and new carpet could be installed. We will be out of our offices until the first week in August. The south side of our offices will be done first and they will start the north side after the dry wall is replaced. Counselors are working from home for the most part.

I attended the BLAST conference in May. I completed my third week of training with the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute in June. I will complete the last session of this training in September. Julie Buren, Wes Majerus and I represented the agency on the Common Intake form committee with the other partners in WIOA. I am working with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Vocational Rehabilitation to place advertisements in Strictly Business for Disability Awareness Month in October.

We had clients obtain jobs as a Hotel Night Clerk, two NBE vendors, a cashier, a counselor and two reservationists.

#### Highlights Omaha District July 2016 by Nancy Flearl

Wow! What a summer. Staff have been working ReBoot, Social Savvy, WAGES, We have 6 students attending wages and 4 attending Social Savvy.

We as a district worked the first week of Wages and did the skill training. The center staff and Shane did a remarkable job. Every detail was planned and organized. The amount of time and effort that went into this is unbelievable. What a team!

I am so glad we provided our clients the opportunity to attend Social Savvy. To witness them putting the skills into practice the following week as they started WAGES. From the common courtesy of holding doors to eating skills. It was wonderful to see them take it all to heart and put into practice. Of course there is always one or two that may be the exception.

Kelly is working on the committee for PI (Project Independence) so another wonderful adventure is around the corner for the week of July 24-28.

We have a few clients attending Camp Abilities the week of July 17-22.

We have had the following people placed in employment status since the last meeting: Their positions are: customer service, switchboard operator, two as production workers, and Chemistry Teacher. One client starts with PayPal in July.

We have a client that is attending HKNC (Helen Keller National Center) in July with a focus on preparing for post-secondary education.

We have a student that will be starting Project Search with Children's Hospital in August. We are working with VODEC and Nebraska Medicine about a couple of adults we are working with for their adult program.

We have the following students working this summer: One at McDonalds, one at Lums, one at One World,

With all the outreach to schools we had a number of referrals from school districts. Likewise since Cheryl attended the diabetes conference here in Omaha we have had more referrals from doctors.

I have met with Think Whole Person clinic and did a presentation to their case managers. Discussed our ability to work with their patients experiencing vision loss and struggling with independence and employment. This clinic houses all types of doctors and therapies and the case managers work with all the providers.

Cheryl has done some health fairs, the most recent with Senator Deb Fischer's office. This was held at Montclair Community Center.

Elaine coordinated the Deaf Blind Proclamation that was on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Several members of Hand in Hand attended. Cheryl is working on a Zoo activity with NCDHH to promote awareness of deafness and deaf-blindness. To be held this fall.

Larry and the Tech team did an awesome job in developing and implementing ReBoot. They have been debriefing to discuss what worked and what would we do different. This was also made possible with assistance of center and field staff. Kudos to all.

#### North Platte (NP) District Highlights by Erin Brandyberry

We had 1 client complete a center tour and a 3-day stay. We referred 2 new clients to the abilities fund who attended the initial presentation in Kearney. We had 7 students attend reBoot camp, and had 4 students attend blind and socially savvy and are currently at WAGES. We had 1 student graduate from Project Search who is now looking for employment. We had 1 successful VR closure with employment as a janitor and a Pre-ETS student gain employment at Runza. We have 2 clients who gained summer employment as WAGES counselors.

It has been an extremely busy quarter with a large number of referrals coming in across our entire district, which we are very excited about. 6 of our 10 staff members helped work WAGES, 1 staff assisted with Blind and Socially Savvy, 2 staff attended

reBoot camp, and 3 staff attended NFB national convention and assisted with chaperoning the WAGES participants. Our district has done 2 of the 3 Easter Seals trainings this quarter.

Deanna is on the statewide Brain Injury Advisory Council as a technical advisor and has attended meetings this quarter. Fritz made contact with all (40 plus) schools in the North Platte district to explain NCBVI services.

Fritz and Diann met with Frontier House (mental health agency) to explain services and have received referrals since then. Angie has been attending a monthly WIOA meeting in Scottsbluff. Angie has done a presentation at a retirement village on the topic of falls related to visual impairment. Jan renewed her teaching endorsement in Business Education and Diversified Occupations which will be current through 2021. Erin spoke on a radio segment to discuss NCBVI services and how to apply.

Sherrie is retiring as a VR tech in the North Platte office after many years of quality service. We are currently hiring to fill her position as her date of resignation is August 1, 2016.

#### Bob Deaton Highlights

Motivational Interviewing Workshops for VR and Orientation Counselors, Center Instructors, and Supervisors scheduled: Room 101 in Carveth Building, Lincoln, October 18-19 and November 15-16.

Networking with Business training for VR and Orientation Counselors, Center Instructors, and Supervisors conducted by Mississippi State University scheduled: Southeast Community College, Lincoln, May 23-25, 2017.

Individual professional development plans should be complete before end of July.

#### Quarterly Report on Transition Activities by Shane Buresh

As I write this quarterly report, Wages is in full swing and other summer programming has already occurred or will be very shortly. A brief summary of these programs will make up the majority of this offering, although I did first want to update a couple of ongoing projects.

One of these is the project with Dr. Meers to provide consultation and establish individualized transition planning for counselors and their clients. The survey he conducted is completed and we are now negotiating phase two of the project to address strategies to overcome barriers he identified for the youth and/or how we serve them. His survey found a number of barriers to employment or other activities for transition youth, such as: time constraints for staff, transportation issues (especially in rural areas), lack of understanding by employers and/or the public, among others. In the next few months, when both staff and students return to a more average daily schedule away from summer programs, Dr. Meers will begin working with and alongside staff to develop individualized plans for pre-ets students we serve.

Later this year we plan to offer some training to Pre-ETS youth in the area of leadership presented by the Carnegie Corporation. This training has been adapted for students from their world renowned curriculum attended by average and Fortune 500 executives alike. It is the belief of both the local Carnegie franchise and me that it

would be the first of its kind involving blind students, which will show Carnegie and society in general that we can be productive students as well.

Since the last meeting we have held the first ever reBoot Camp which was designed to acquire and provide direct instruction for assistive technology beneficial to blind youth. As you know we focused on the iPad pro during this session. 37 youth received iPad Pros, a bundle of productivity applications, including the KNFB Reader, and a digital curriculum to help the learning to continue on into the future. Also to keep the learning going, we included teachers and parents, so that those in the student's support system also had the information their youth received. There were two full days of direct instruction for all and evening sessions designed specifically for students and parents to meet and discuss their own specific issues in breakout sessions. We even had a session with individuals from the Omaha Apple store which is a very unique event as Apple rarely allows for these types of events or their instructors to attend other groups training sessions. While there were some hiccups and improvements we would like to implement next time around, in the end this session was a great success. Parents, teachers and most importantly students all have given positive feedback to the team about how and what great take away information they received. In conclusion the more than 75 persons who attended for one reason or another will all look back with pride that they attended the first reBoot Camp for blind youth in Nebraska.

Beginning the same evening as reBoot Camp concluded, WAGES started. This year the first week of the program was the first of two sessions of Blind and Socially Savvy. There are 18 youth enrolled at WAGES. Each of these students took the Blind and Socially Savvy course presented by Eileen Rivera Ley and her business partner Cathleen Hanson, who is the CEO of the International School of Protocol. Like Carnegie mentioned above, this school is renowned for educating folks on how to put their best foot forward in work or social situations. The workshop we presented has been adapted for the unique needs of blind persons by Eileen Rivera Ley. The students learned leadership skills, social etiquette, continental dining skills, how to network, how to dress for success and much, much more. The students hosted two separate networking events where strangers to them from the world of business came to a social event to meet them and one another. The students handed out their own business cards and made a tremendous impression on others for themselves and for the commission in general. I wish you could have all seen it they would have made you proud.

The program concluded with a three course graduation dinner and the students received a certificate for completing 40 hours of training.

Two weeks later, the same curriculum was repeated for non-Wages students who are Pre-ETS. 7 more students graduated from the International School of Protocol. It is difficult to put into words the positive changes I observed in the students from both Blind and Socially Savvy classes. The instructors tell me that many of our students have natural leadership skills. Many commission staff also assisted with the workshops and they may be able to be certified as instructors in the future, which would allow us to provide the curriculum in-house.

Wages has also demonstrated the growth potential in our youth. The 18 youth have taken the training and ran with it head on into their jobs and are really impressing their

employers. This summer WAGES students work both at employment sites and complete half days of sleep shade training. They complete approximately 15 or more hours of each every week.

In order to accomplish all of this training we have had to involve a number of commission staff. The great benefit of this is that it has allowed for the awesome commitment and creativity of many staff to be demonstrated. Members of all three districts and the center are all taking turns with instruction during the program. The Center also developed and created the skill training materials.

Many staff also stepped up to the plate to chaperone students during convention and on activities in Florida. It is hard to believe that there are only two more work weeks left in WAGES. The growth in the students is tremendous and they are emerging as a group who sees their blindness as a part of them not a barrier.

Project Independence will also happen two days after WAGES is over. We have 14 youth between 6 and 13 who will attend this year. Our theme is "Come Sail Away With Me", which is an off shoot of a quote that they will learn about, which states "A ship is safe in a harbor but that isn't what ships were built for". Beyond the customary sleep shade training; we will once again be conducting the home chore challenge, taking air boat rides, learning to listen for birds, doing audio archery, building our own ships, completing a "wordle" project (for self-esteem building), cooking our own dinner over the camp fire, running our own ice cream shop, taking a field trip into Omaha, and much more.

As you can see the summer has been both exciting and busy. Lest I end with a pun it will be difficult to transition back into the traditional school year and fall.

## **Technology Program Report by Wes Majerus**

### **Operations**

I returned from my three-week absence for ACL reconstruction surgery and recovery on June 16, 2016. Before my departure on May 26, the bulk of the work of the Technology Program was reBoot Camp. We held several Tech Team meetings to plan the curriculum of the camp and to research apps and their behaviors on various devices. The District Technology Specialists also worked to sort inbound shipments and insure that each student's technology was properly accounted for. We used the Apple Volume Purchase Program to procure the bulk quantity of apps for the participants in reBoot Camp and I have used it to procure some apps for clients. It works as advertised and does streamline the procurement of applications. Due to contract discussions, I am not yet able to use the VPP to purchase staff applications despite the fact that many staff would like to have the KNFB Reader. I express appreciation to all who assisted in getting reBoot Camp off the ground and to those who assisted in getting items and applications procured. I especially appreciate the work of the Tech Team who pinch hit for me in my absence just before and during the camp.

Work continues on the NCBVI web site. We have provided content to Nebraska Interactive, also known as Nebraska.gov, and they have begun to upload it to the site. The largest aspect of this was having the minutes of past board meetings converted to PDF from HTML. I believe this is a good move for the future as the minutes aren't directly tied to the website during viewing, are more readily viewed offline and on a number of device types, and other organizations now use PDF files for this purpose. The committee met on July 7 and identified some missing content that we will have located or created for upload.

Windows 10 has been available for almost a year. Due to limitations imposed by the Office of the CIO, we have not been able to explore the operating system in house. We recently bought two Microsoft Surface tablets, one is in Omaha and will be left in its manufactured state and the other is in the Lincoln Administrative offices. We had this second tablet imaged to the specifications that the Office of the Chief Information Officer will use when we eventually move to Windows 10 as a staff. Thus far, the system is working well. I have been taking some time over the past few weeks to become acquainted with nuances of Windows 10 and have shared some of those with staff and Commissioners. We have also procured some new laptops for staff, four of which will go to the Center and Tech Specialists respectively and will have Windows 10 with touch screens.

I continue to work on some existing projects. Work continues with State Purchasing to find a way to move forward in the procuring of a new Case Management System. I believe it is still prudent to move toward a Commercially-Available Off the Shelf system so that the work of upgrading and maintaining the system can be spread among several entities and the loss of employees or contractors will not mean a loss of knowledge about the inner workings of the system. Problems also still plague our Lexmark copier here in Lincoln. While fundamentally, the copier is doing what we would like it to, we have issues with network connectivity. We are now involving the office of the CIO in a final effort to see where the problems lie. We are in close discussions with SolutionOne and the manufacturer. If a remedy cannot be found in the foreseeable future, we may need to return to using copiers from the State Copy Services Contract. If that does become a necessity, we will attempt to find the most accessible copier they have that includes tactile buttons and the ability to create searchable PDF files with no intervention by the operator.

### **Accessibility**

Nebraska State Purchasing put together a consulting project to determine how their services can be beneficial to State agencies. After an interview with a number of agencies, it was decided that longer, individual interviews should be conducted. I sat in on this interview and explained some of my concerns about finding contracts to buy items, determining how to purchase off the contract, the inaccessibility of vendors' web sites, and relations with vendors. I urged this consultant that any system developed needs to have accessibility built into it from the outset otherwise we will be further behind than we now are, especially if the system is used to order items off of contracts and the like. The trend in State Government is when portals like these are developed; they become the sole avenue through which business can be conducted. If the portal is inaccessible, it will make it difficult to do the procurement that needs to be done in my and other positions inside NCBVI.

H/R QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS by Dave Robinson

April 21 to July 6, 2016

Stephanie Wagle was selected to fill the vacant VR Counselor II position vacated by Larry Mackey. Stephanie began her duties on May 16, 2016.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Technician position previously occupied by Stephanie Wagle was advertised. The job opened on May 23, 2016 and will close on June 3, 2016. Thirty-One applications were received and are in the process of being screened.

Seven finalists interviewed for the Business Manager II position. An individual was selected for the position, but then chose employment elsewhere. The Business Manager II position was re-opened on July 1, 2016, with a closing date of July 15, 2016.

Open enrollment for the July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 plan year ended on May 25, 2016.

Sherrie Bruegman announced her retirement, effective August 1, 2016, so a job posting for her position was immediately opened on July 1, 2016, with a closing date of July 15, 2016.

Kathy Stephens – Quarterly Highlights

Working with Chet's Moving Company to get office furniture moved out of Center so painting and carpet and be completed. Chet's will come back on July 13 to move everything back and haul some items to State Surplus.

I participated on interview team for the Business Manager II position. Unfortunately, the position will need to be reopened.

I am working on end of fiscal year inventory scanning.

I attended a Blind and Socially Savvy event at Chase Suites.

I completed registrations and reservations for some clients and staff attending National Conventions.

We received two 12 passenger van from TSB (Transportation Service Bureau) on June 9. NCBVI will be using the vans for Summer programs. The vans will be returned to TSB in early August.

I assisted in the Bell Program scavenger hunt on June 15. My office was one of the locations that the participants are to locate. One of their action items was to tell me a joke.

Business Office - Bill Brown

Procurement trailer and case management system

Work with Alliance and other states on CMS procurement

State fiscal year close  
Audit recommendations  
Board fiscal review needs  
Hiring business manager position  
Vending machine contract  
Contract form  
Contract database training  
Omaha Staff Fiscal Training  
Grant Status updates and alignment for Reallotment

## **Unfinished Business**

### WIOA Regulations

The regulations for the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act, WIOA have been issued. The Commission works under the state VR plan, which had previously been submitted to the US Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), but is now a portion of State of Nebraska WIOA plan. We have been a part of the Core Partners with the Nebraska WIOA for a while to help develop the comprehensive plan as well as our own plan.

The new roles require all the insurance and descriptive information be submitted as a part of the whole plan. Update to the state wide needs, goals, and priorities needs to align with the report of the combined plan. Clarification about this been requested. The Commission does ongoing state wide needs assessments. This will continue no matter what the regulations say. The specific state wide need assessment is different because we hire an outside identity to do state wide needs assessment.

There is different cross referencing about Common Performance Accountability Measures. The RSA standards and indicators will no longer be official standards. All the WIOA parts will be held to the Common Performance Measures.

Competitive Integrated employment fits well with what we already do. Neither homemaker nor unpaid family members are viable employment goals, under the new regulations. This will not affect a large number of people, but does affect some potential clients in small businesses or farms.

Some confusion still remains in Pre-ETS. New definitions about students with disability and youth disability are out. Student with a disability applies to all student enrolled in an educational program, including post-secondary education as long as they meet the age requirements. This includes homeschooled and other nontraditional post-secondary programs.

The part that impacts the budget is the new requirement to spend at least 15% of federal allotment on Pre-ETS clients. If agencies do not spend the full amount, there is a possibility that remaining funds will have to be returned to the federal government. Our agency is working with Nebraska Voc. Rehab, the general agency, as they have expressed they may have trouble meeting the 15% requirement. The requirement

looks at the state as a whole and not as parts, so the state must be able to meet this requirement as a whole.

2015 grant funds are still being spent right now. We are required to spend those funds before spending the 2016 grant. The federal grant funds are able to be carried over to the next year.

Technical Assistance was also clarified. Agencies may provide services to educational agencies to support groups of students with disabilities.

RSA is holding meetings that will help clarify some of the issues and questions. The Commission for the Blind will be attending a meeting in Chicago. Each agency is allowed two spots. Pearl and Carlos will attend; as will Bill Brown, if a third spot can be procured.

Commissioner Hansen asked if the Commission is able to exceed the 15% for our agency, if that will aid General Voc. Rehab. Dr. Van Zandt agreed. Commissioner Bell asked what would occur if the Commission was unable to meet the spending requirement, and if the money would be taken out of the following years funds. Pearl states that the money would have to be sent back, and if the money would be taken out of that year's funding.

Commissioner Hansen asked if a memorandum about Voc Rehab paying its own portion needs to be created. Dr. Van Zandt indicated that that measure was probably not needed as there is already an understanding in place.

Commissioner Bulger asked if WIOA would change how the commissioner's meetings are held and how the NCBVI operates. Dr. Van Zandt explained that this will not dramatically change how meetings are held. There are four chapters of rules on state laws, and the Commission is at a point where they need to be revising them. The Commission will begin this process next year, as it is a rigidly defined process.

Commissioner Hansen asked Dr. Van Zandt to clarify Section 511, as it pertains to special wage certificates, and it pertaining to Outlook Nebraska for the opportunities it provides. Dr. Van Zandt explained that to her knowledge, Outlook Nebraska does not pay any subminimum wages, but some workshops that employ individuals with cognitive disabilities still do. The Commission normally does not have clients that work there, but there is a potential in the future. Dr. Van Zandt mentioned that there are other opportunities for blind individuals, including Supported Employment which is a viable employment outcome.

Commissioner Bulger asked how this will change the day to day business, and he wanted to know how it will affect the budget. Pearl explained that some aspects are confusing from the rules, like orientation and mobility training provided in a group is considered Pre-ETS, while individually, it is not. A large portion of the work done in the WAGES program is done as group work, and expanding programs like REBOOT are Pre-ETS. Supported employment portion of the funds have a mandate that 50% must be spent on Pre-ETS.

## Budget and Biennium Update

The monthly expenditures have been less focused on older blind as the focus has been on group programs. We will spend the entire older blind grant by the end of the September. The older blind population is the majority of blind persons with the minority of funding, so locating funds is sometimes a challenge. Some older individuals want to have a job, and they can be opened as a VR client as there are no age restrictions on becoming a VR client. The leadership team is working with supervisors, who work with all staff, on how to provide the best services possible.

Commissioner Hansen asked for clarification on the Commission asking for \$40,000.00 more for the state budget. Dr. Van Zandt clarified that the Commission is making a flat request. The budget process dictates that the money allocation has to be broken down to indicate where the money would be spent. Labor negotiated staff pay increases is one of the areas. \$40,000.00 of the requested money from the state will be used to provide independent living services for adults who do not have a vocational goal. It would replace what we would have received from Part-B from the federal government, and a little more. If we do not receive additional funding, those services can no longer be provided by the Commission.

Commissioner Hansen asked for clarification on in if homemakers and unpaid family workers would be served under independent living services, or would the funds need to be increased to cover those types of cases. Pearl explained that the Commission will be fine covering the clients in that type of position because there were not a lot of clients in it. There will also be networking with NFBN, ACBN, and independent living centers to find ways to work together and possibly provide consult to them to service visually impaired individuals who need independence living training. By August 1, 2016, Pearl will submit the narrative. The full budget request will be submitted by September 15, 2016.

In general, the funding is going well. Conversations with the governor's budget office about grants and federal funds have been started.

Commissioner Bulger made the comment that he is worried about the perception about money being spent so it is not given back to the federal government due to the WIOA guidelines. He does not want the Pre-ETS clients to have a feeling of entitlement, and he wants to be sure that money is spent in the best places because there are struggling Nebraskans who are watching how the Commission is spending the grant money.

Dr. Van Zandt agreed with Commissioner Bulger on the aspect of using grant money appropriately. She also wanted to clarify that the money that will be taken back by the federal government will not only be Pre-ETS funds; rather, the budget for everything will be affected by returning money.

## Newsline® Update

July 15, 2016 by Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator

Summer has really heated up things with NFB-Newsline®! Three new publications have been added, new store circulars are available and the job listings channel has been expanded! Not to mention the stats for the past two months are really sizzling! Jet Magazine, The Forward and Sky News were all added in May. Jet is the number one African-American newsweekly and has more than seven million readers! Since its debut in 1951 the Jet has been a staple in homes and businesses and contains authoritative, credible and entertaining information. It is best known by its catchphrase: "If it wasn't in JET, it didn't happen." The Forward, which was founded in 1897, delivers incisive coverage of the issues, ideas and institutions that matter to American Jews. The Forward has won many awards thanks to its balanced commentary on the arts, politics and culture and is the most widely read Jewish newspaper. Sky News is a 24-hour international, multi-media news operation based in Britain. It provides non-stop rolling news and breaking news across a variety of platforms.

As subscribers plan summer picnics, weekend barbeques and pool parties they can now check out NFB-Newsline® for the greatest deals at Walmart! The Walmart store circulars are now available along with the Target circulars under option 6 from the main menu. Product and pricing information can be found for the subscribers nearest store or a store in another location. Subscribers can now "Save money, live better" with Walmart and NFB-Newsline®!

After the fun in the sun is over it's time to get back to work and what better way to search for a job than through the job listings on NFB-Newsline®. The NFB has partnered with USA JOBS to provide even more jobs under the job listings feature. USA JOBS is a free web-based job board enabling federal job seekers access to thousands of opportunities across hundreds of federal agencies and organizations, providing public notice for federal employment opportunities. Subscribers can search jobs by radius from a zip code, category, salary range or even certain search phrases. The USA JOBS is in addition to the more than 100,000 jobs already provided by Career Builder and can be accessed under option 9 from the main menu.

Now on to the sizzling hot stats from May and June! Seventeen new subscribers were added for a balmy total of 1,906! The phone lines were hot with 3,610 calls made to Newsline for a total of 45,041 minutes spent on the phone. Subscribers called into Newsline using the regional number 35.67% of the time over the last two months and the average call lasted 33.12 minutes. Accessing NFB-Newsline® on the go is quickly becoming subscriber's favorite access method with 6,836 total online accesses for May and June. That includes on the web, in your pocket deliveries and through the mobile app. Not counting the 2,439 emails that were sent to subscribers!

The content that was accessed via the phone and online methods were Nebraska publications and local channel, national and international news, breaking news and weather alerts, magazines and TV listings. These categories were accessed 10,708 times with the most popular category, by a long shot, Nebraska newspapers! The second favorite category among subscribers is national publications followed closely by TV listings.

The summer temps just keep raising, so why not stay cool inside as you listen to your favorite publication on NFB-Newsline®. This concludes my report for this sunny quarter. As always contact me with questions or concerns and happy reading!

### Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

There were no new cases to the Client Assistance Program relating to the NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) during this time.

Shari Bahensky visited the Norfolk Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff in May to show our new CAP/Hotline website and directory of resources available. Also during this time, she wanted to test out the website to make sure it was compatible with the assistive technology needs for those with visual impairments. Glenn tested the site and it worked for him. She plans to meet with more of the Commission offices soon.

Victoria Rasmussen provided new staff training to three new staff members in May at the Lincoln office. Two were new Center staff and one was an Administrative staff.

Shari Bahensky is now the CAP Director.

### Anonymous Staff Suggestions

Commissioner Hansen brought up two anonymous staff suggestions. The first being unnecessary emails being sent out, and the NCBVI leadership addressed the issue.

The second suggestion regarded a staff member concerned with tax payers supporting students, staff and parents in attending the NFB National Convention in Orlando. They were concerned if clients would be getting anything out of it, and if they would be able to sit through general session meetings.

Commissioner Hansen stated that all attendees get something out of attending the convention. All different age groups obtain a different lesson while attending the convention. Sighted parents also learn different lessons while at the convention. The WAGES students, in attending the convention, were able to see a large number of blind individuals traveling independently and had the opportunity to find good role models that would inspire them. He addressed the idea that the students would not absorb everything from the convention, but adults do not absorb everything, either. The opportunity gave the students a venue for networking with others with blindness.

Commissioner Rieken commented that the convention allowed parents of blind children to see successful blind adults so they can hold their children up to the same standard as a sighted individual. She explained she appreciated the comment from the staff member, as the Commission needs to be conscious of how we spend the funds and to use them in an appropriate manner. She also wanted to comment she supported the Commission on the activity they planned.

Commissioner Newman reminded the board members and the public about the email Dr. Van Zandt sent from the parent who attending the convention with their child. The email was very positive about the experience.

Commissioner Rieken spoke about the convention being more than the meetings the students were exposed to. At the convention, confident and successful blind people could be seen, and noticed that the students saw individuals who had diverse careers instead of just "comfort level careers". Parents were able to see their children with friends. One student mentioned to Commissioner Rieken that it "was liberating" to be at the convention, and she commented on one student being excited to see all the new technology that was being introduced. She made the final remark that it was an awesome opportunity.

Commissioner Hansen stated it was a great opportunity for college age students to see all the devices available for them.

Commissioner Bulger commented that qualitative value could be seen in attending the convention. He felt that the same students should not be sent to the same event a second time.

Commissioner Bell stated he was glad the students were given the opportunity to go. He said that it may not be seen the changes in the students today, but a seed was planted.

Commissioner Hansen said that the anonymous staff suggestions will now be a part of the normal Commissioner's Meeting.

#### Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update

As a result of several meetings with Administrative Services, we were able to renegotiate a new contract for the State Office Building and without rent, which brings more money to our Licensee operating the facility.

The Department of Roads awarded NCBVI two contracts. The first is to run a café which started on July 5. It is being operated with local restaurants catering, like Lincoln SOB. The second award is to run 13 vending machines in their three buildings starting September 1. Both of these contracts are without rent.

Our newest vendor has started at the Norfolk post office two months ago with two small post offices. Another Licensee started over a month ago at the Nebraska Historical Society museum's two locations in Lincoln. This vendor moved from North Platte and is also operating four small post office annexes. So he will have these six locations.

The NBE team has been doing presentations at NCBVI District Offices to better inform counselors about the program and how someone can become a licensee. Several counselors have come to Don with possible prospects. A few years ago we started to get field counselors more involved with the process and support when getting their clients to the NBE program. This new approach continues to evolve and

counselors are working closely with their clients and the NBE, resulting in better candidates. Abilities Fund is also becoming instrumental on assisting candidates to be ready to become Licensees as well as helping current vendors improve their business practice.

Another recent opportunity was presented to us by Nebraska Department of Corrections, to operate vending machines in 9 to 11 buildings across the State. Pearl and I met with Inga Hookstra, the DOC Controller. As a result, Don will start visiting their building this coming Wednesday, July 26. We will begin looking at locations and placing machines one building at a time.

We have also been contacted by State Building Division about the potential to operate vending at the Omaha State Office Building. It is likely to be available to us after October 31, 2016.

We believe that we are getting the recent locations as a result of our conversations with the Attorney General's office, top management of Administrative Services, Senators, and the Governor's office.

Update on Department of Roads (DOR) ADA rest area project: All work is done at this point until DOR moves on with continued renovations. Grand Island will be next in the list. There is no word yet on when they will move further west after that.

Remodeling has completed at the Immigration building in Lincoln, and all of our machines are back in place. Remodeling at the Craft State Office Building in North Platte is also completed. We are in the process of putting machines back with a no rent agreement.

We decided not to have an annual training retreat for the licensees, but instead add a training session on each quarterly meeting for the committee members. This is working out very well.

We advertised, interviewed, and offered the NBE position to a fine candidate, but she declined because she accepted another job. We are advertising again and should be interviewing two or three candidates next week. If we do not get a decent candidate, we are thinking about keeping the job open until filled.

#### Discuss and Act on proposed changes to the Commission Board Job Description

Proposed changes to the Commission Board Job Description are as follows:  
Commissioners shall:

1. Employ an Executive Director who is the administrative officer of NCBVI and who shall serve at the pleasure of the Board.
2. Annually evaluate the Executive Director using a specified performance tool created by the Board and approved by State Personnel under the Department of Administrative Services.
3. Provide guidance to the Executive Director in carrying out the mission of NCBVI.

4. Seek input from both consumers and staff through public meetings, correspondence, surveys, etc.
5. Approve rules, regulations and policies adopted and promulgated by NCBVI.
6. Have a working knowledge of the Rehabilitation Act (WIOA), rules and regulations, and other materials necessary for the operation of NCBVI.
7. Serve as a liaison between the public and NCBVI.
8. Annually elect a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and an Executive Secretary.
9. Attend and participate in NCBVI functions whenever possible, meeting with the entire staff as often as feasible.
10. Receive, read and respond in a timely manner to materials from the Executive Director, NCBVI staff, consumers and fellow Commissioners, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
11. Receive both written and in-person agency reports from NCBVI staff, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
12. Receive and read NCBVI budgetary information and monitor that process, asking for follow-up materials and/or clarification as needed.
13. Answer questions from consumers, NCBVI employees and the general public about NCBVI programs, processes, policies and procedures, seeking input from appropriate staff in order to provide accurate and up-to-date information.
14. Receive, only for purposes of her/his evaluation and guidance, reports from the Executive Director on unresolved personnel matters, including a description of the situation, a synopsis of progress toward resolution, and a summary of any policy changes implemented to address the problem, only when such matters reach a level requiring her/his intervention. The Board will not intervene in personnel issues, recognizing that there is a labor dispute process for State employees in place in the State of Nebraska.
15. Make suggestions and recommendations to NCBVI that will improve its operation and that will lead to better services to its consumers.
16. Communicate as a body only after reaching a consensus and only over the signature of the Chairperson.
17. When Communicating as an individual Board Member, a Board Member should use good judgment and discretion, and with a clear indication that they are speaking for himself/herself rather than as a spokesperson for the Board.
18. Develop and maintain a Commissioner Information Packet that will facilitate training of new Board Members.
19. See that new Commissioners become familiar with the materials in the Commissioner Information Packet, that they become familiar with the programs and office locations of the Commission, and review Commission Reports and Board motions involving NCBVI operations.

Commissioner Hansen made a motion to accept the proposed changes to the Commission Board Job Description and Commissioner Newman accepted. Commissioner Bell seconded. The commissioners voted unanimously to accept the proposed changes.

Discuss and Act on memo requesting notice from the Executive Director prior to retirement or resignation

Policy Statement

## Timely Notice of Retirement or Resignation by the NCBVI Executive Director

While the position of Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired does not fall under the standard policies of the State of Nebraska Department of Administrative Services Division of State Personnel, the Board of Commission does try to be fair and honorable in its requests of the individual holding this position. The NCBVI policy regarding timely notice of resignation or retirement asks that administrators give one (1) month notice prior to resigning or retiring. The NCBVI Board of Commissioners feels that due to requirements of the person holding the position of Executive Director; it will take substantially longer for a search committee to fill this position. For this reason we would request that the Executive Director provide notice of six (6) months prior to retirement.

Being that the Executive Director is still expected to perform all of their normal duties during this time of transition, the Board of Commissioners will not restrict the Executive Director from traveling or attending conferences as needed during their final months in the position.

The Board of Commissioners also understands that six (6) months' notice is not practical in the event that the Executive Director might wish to resign. If it is the intent of the Executive Director to resign from their position, the Board of Commissioners would request that 60 days' notice be given. During this period, the Board of Commissioners will name an Interim Executive Director. Once an Interim Executive Director has been named, both individuals are asked to work together to ensure as smooth of a transition as possible while the Board of Commissioners begins the search process for a permanent replacement.

Failure to provide prior written notice to the Board of Commissioners in the amount of time outlined above may be considered as separated not in good standing. If written notice is given less than ten working days prior to retirement or resignation, the individual will be presented with a letter notifying them that they may not be eligible for rehire in the event application is made for re-employment at some future date.

Commissioner Hansen stated that the request had been for twelve months, and questioned if a shorter time should be used in the policy. Commissioner Bulger questioned if a year was a realistic time frame to ask from the executive director, and if the time frame would be a suggestion or a mandate. Commissioner Hansen explained that it would be a request as the commissioners did not know what punitive action would be held against the executive director except a negative reference for the executive director if they were to look for another job. Commissioner Hansen agreed that six months was an acceptable time frame, and Commissioner Rieken agreed. It was also stated that the six months can also depend on circumstances surrounding the retirement. Commissioner Bell moved the policy with corrections of changing the twelve months requirement to six months' notice. Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously passed.

## Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim appreciated the comment about the concern about the Orlando trip. He questioned how the decision was made to send the WAGES students to the NFB convention, and what funding mechanism was used.

Carlos Servan replied that the Commission sent information to parents to determine which convention they wanted their child to attend. The Commission assumed the parents talked to their children to gauge which they would like to attend.

Commissioner Bulger questioned what sources the parents and students had to make their decision. Carlos responded that the parents were told to use the internet. To be completely transparent Carlos stated that if parents also asked counselors where to go, the counselors told the parents where they went.

Dr. Van Zandt explained that the amount the trip cost is unknown at this time. The cost would cover meals, air travel, and lodging. A family member and a student were supported in attending. If another family member came, the extra cost was covered by the family. Not every student had a family member present.

Carlos stated that staff members were instructed to tell parents that staff members would be sent to the ACB convention if a client would prefer to attend that convention.

Commissioner Bulger asked if other states sent clients similar to the WAGES students. Pearl answered that some other states did. She stated that some students whose state programs are not sending clients to a national convention opted to attend a program in another state so that they could experience a national convention.

Bob Deaton - Bob commented that it is important to note students had the opportunity to meet role models at the convention, and questioned if a program could be replicated in Nebraska. He believed that it could not be, as there were many specialized divisions for certain vocational goals at the national convention that could not be replicated in Nebraska.

Diann Vargas - Diann commented that the opportunity was for the youth to utilize the convention as a way to connect with other youth across the country. The opportunity was important because Nebraskans can be very sheltered.

#### Lunch Break

A lunch break was taken at 12:38 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 1:13 p.m.

#### Report from the Audit Committee

The Audit Committee that was formed at the May 7th NCBVI Commission Board meeting along with Dr. Pearl Van Zandt and Bill Brown shared ideas and reviewed example financial report options this past month via email and met via conference call on the evening of June 23rd. The following recommendations are a result of those shared ideas and that conference call.

1. It is recommended that a permanent finance committee be formed consisting of 3 members of the commission board. NCBVI's Executive Director and Business Manager should serve as advisers to this committee. The financial committee should meet via conference call as often as necessary but no less than quarterly.
2. It is recommended that NCBVI's Business Manager be asked to supply the finance committee with monthly budget status reports as well as monthly categorical spending reports.
3. It is recommended that NCBVI Administration be asked to give the finance committee 7 days notification before making purchases over \$50,000. Included with this notification will be an explanation of the funding sources for this purchase and its impact to the budget.
4. It is recommended that NCBVI Administration be asked to brief / review the commission's budget with the finance committee each year as the budget is being developed.

Commissioner Hansen noted that for future reference, when a committee is formed with three or more people on the committee, public meetings laws must be followed. The committee meeting for the audit did not follow the Open Meeting Laws when the three commissioners met, so the process will be continued in normal meetings. He wanted it noted so the mistake does not happen again.

#### Discuss and act on the report from the Audit Committee

Commissioner Hansen did not believe forming a permanent finance committee was the best solution, and believed that the entire board should work together as a finance committee. He believed that Bill Brown could still provide the commissioners the reports between meetings. There are provisions in place that allow for emergency conference calls, if needed. He believed quarterly meetings would allow a time for questions to be asked because commissioners would be receiving the monthly budget status updates.

Commissioner Bell agreed with the idea that a subcommittee was not needed. He also added that emails could be sent to Bill once the reports are given to the Commissioners if questions needed to be addressed.

Commissioner Hansen suggested having a seven days' notice to the board prior to a purchase over \$50,000. He also suggested have a policy that addressed purchases that may raise public question.

Commissioner Bell agreed that \$50,000 was a good budget number because it would cover purchases like the new client management software. Commissioner Bell also liked the idea of the board being told about abnormal purchases prior to them being made.

Dr. Van Zandt asked if the Commission needed approval from the board to make the type of purchases in question or if the board only needed to be informed.

Commissioner Hansen clarified that the board would only need to be informed of purchases, then the board could call an emergency meeting if they found an issue with the purchase. If the board did nothing in the seven days, the Commission could move forward with the purchase.

Dr. Van Zandt made a comment that the audit specified that the commissioners needed to play a larger role in the commission. Commissioner Hansen agreed, as the audit committee indicated the commissioners need a larger involvement in the review of the financials. This has been an issue for a long time, and he believes it is time to solve it. He stated that he understands the solution will not be perfect in the beginning, but it will evolve as time continues. Commissioner Hansen clarified that this measure was not to micromanage the Commission; rather, was to make the commissioners aware of funding. Commissioner Hansen also brought up that the public meeting policy allows commissioners to have training sessions.

Commissioner Hansen moved to ask NCBVI business manager to supply the business monthly reports as well as monthly categorical spending reports, seconded by Commissioner Bell. The motion was approved unanimously, and passed.

Commissioner Hansen moved to require that NCBVI administration give the board a 7 day notice prior to making purchases of an abnormal nature or that would be seen as controversial. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. Commissioners Bell, Newman, Hansen, and Rieken voted in favor of the motion. Commissioner Bulger voted against the motion. The motion was passed.

Commissioner Hansen moved that the board would ask that the NCBCVI administration to brief the commission board regarding the full budget during the biannual budget development process. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously, and passed.

#### Discuss language of the Policy on Commissioner Attendance at Consumer Conventions

The policy for Commissioner Attendance at Consumer Conventions is as follows: Recognizing that the Commissioners serving on the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired serve those people in the state who are blind; it is important for board members to be in touch with the people we serve. Attendance at consumer conventions, whenever possible, is one way to measure the pulse of blind Nebraskans. While not required, it is a great listening opportunity when commissioners attend the state ACB and NFB conventions. It is also important for board members to attend the national conventions of these groups to understand the philosophy of each organization, as well as how these organizations affect policy in each state.

#### **POLICY:**

1. Any active board member may request financial reimbursement for attendance at two national and two state organization activities in their four-year term. This would include the state conventions of the ACB or NFB and national conventions of these two organizations.

2. Board members attending the conventions would have their travel, hotel, meal, and registration expenses paid for (in accordance with State Regulations) and internal determination of coverage of staff expenses by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired. The internal determination of coverage of staff expenses will be reviewed annually by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired administration. Whether or not a board member could attend the activity would ultimately depend on the budget of the agency.
3. Approval of attendance will be accomplished by a member requesting funds in a public meeting of the Board of Commissioners, a reason why he or she wanted to attend the event, followed by majority approval of the other Commissioners.
4. Upon the completion of the trip, a report, no more than one page in length, shall be generated to the Commissioners and the Executive Director and shall be presented at a public meeting of the Board of Commissioners thereby making it a part of the public record via the minutes.
5. Per Diem will not be paid for these events.

Commissioner Rieken asked for clarification about the \$145 a day, and if it would cover the expenses of hotel room, meals registration for the convention, and banquet. Commissioner Hansen explained that the second section will answer this question. He specified that the policy reads that expenses would be paid in full. The Commission makes a determination as to what can be afforded for staff members going and commissioners have been following the same guidelines.

Dr. Van Zandt explained that NCBVI covers the cost of the banquet and registration in full. The per-diem is covered by the \$145 a day. It is given whether full or partial assistance is given as stated by state regulations. She also clarified that the \$145 a day would pay for expenses like travel, lodging, and meals. The cost of the banquet and registration would be paid for by the Commission in full, not included in the \$145.

Commissioner Hansen said that the coverage of registration and banquet could vary depending on the year. He stated that it should be added that the costs covered for the Commission and would be determined by what staff members are receiving. The determination should be reviewed annually. Any Commissioner should feel comfortable asking for permission to attend. If the Commissioner cannot attend the conference due to financial reasons due to the agency's determination, the Commissioner is not required to attend.

Commissioner Rieken asked for clarification as to if airfare was included. Commissioner Hansen moved to reword the bullet point number two of the Commissioner Attendance of Consumer Convention Policy to read, "Board members attending the conventions would have their travel, hotel, meal, and registration expenses paid for in accordance with State Regulations, and internal determination of coverage of staff expenses by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired. The internal determination of coverage of staff expenses will be reviewed annually by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired administration. Whether or not a board member could attend the activity would ultimately depend on the budget of the agency." Commissioner Bell seconded. The vote was unanimous in favor, and the motion was passed.

Commissioner Rieken asked about the ability to attend conventions if a Commissioner was reelected. Commissioner Hansen clarified that the reelected Commissioner would start over, and would be able to attend two national and two state conventions in the new term. Dr. Van Zandt requested to prorate a commissioner's ability to request to attend a convention depending on the amount of time left on a term if they enter office during the middle of a term.

#### Officer Elections

Commissioner Bulger moved to elect Commissioner Hansen as Chairperson. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken; Newman, Bell, Bulger and Rieken were in favor of the motion. Commissioner Hansen abstained.

Commissioner Bell moved to elect Commissioner Newman as Vice Chairperson. Commissioner Bulger seconded the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Newman moved to elect Commissioner Rieken as Executive Secretary. A roll call vote was taken; Newman, Hansen, Bell and Bulger were in favor of the motion. Commissioner Rieken abstained.

#### Public Comment

Adrienne Moody commented that WAGES participants did say that they found mentors while at the NFB convention, so the convention attendance was important.

#### Final Announcements

The next meeting of the NCBVI Board of Commissioners will be on November 5, 2016 in Omaha, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be Brochures, Website, Social Media, etc.

#### Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:21 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 5, 2016 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at [ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov](mailto:ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov).

Respectfully submitted,  
Adrienne Moody, VR Technician  
NCBVI

Mike Hansen, Chairperson  
NCBVI Board of Commissioners