

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Public Meeting  
Saturday, May 2, 2020  
9:00 A.M.  
Teleconference Meeting; statewide

MINUTES

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

Mark Bulger, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Pursuant to Executive Order number 20-03, signed by Governor Pete Ricketts on March 17, 2020 granting special waivers to the Open Meetings Act, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted by telephone conference call. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mark Bulger, Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City; Kimberly Scherbarth, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Kearney; Brent Heyen, Lincoln.

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director; Kat Carroll, Business Manager III; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant.

Public present: Cheryl Livingston, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Omaha; Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Brad Loos, Lincoln; and Teresa Gregg, Omaha.

The Open Meeting Act was sent electronically to those in attendance via conference call. 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 ACBN, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the February 1, 2020 Public Meeting minutes.

Commissioner Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the February 1, 2020 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Heyen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Report from the Executive Director

## **I. Administration**

I had a follow-up meeting with representative from DAS, OCIO, Nebraska Technology Commission, and UNL to continue working on drafting the new Technology Clause rules. As I reported last time, former commissioner Mike Hansen is also on this committee, and we contacted with Chris Boone to draft the rule. We have a final draft of what is now called the Technology Accessibility Standards. We are in the process of determining which agency will include this new language in its rules and then follow the process to publish the new rules.

I attended a couple of meetings with the WIOA partners and the WIOA State Board in the last couple of months. In addition, we wrote NCBVI's portion of the Combined State Plan for the public hearing, which took place on February 10. NCBVI's our portion of the Combined State Plan was submitted to RSA by the end of March.

We do not have any clients on the wait list and we were told by RSA that we need to wait until July, for the State Plan to be approved, to get off Order of Selection.

The RSA monitoring visit was rescheduled to the week of September 14, 2020. The leadership team also attended a couple of national teleconferences with Assistant Secretary of Education, Mark Schultz. The RSA flexibilities for Pre-ETS finally came out and we are now able to charge transportation along with room and board to Pre-ETS. As a result, our staff would like to hold WINNERFEST again. Our new contract with the NFB Mentoring will reflect this. We will also be able to charge the expenses for room and board from WAGES.

I participated on a panel for the Community of Partners for agencies for the blind on April 14 to talk about how our agency is dealing with COVID-19. Much of my time in the last several weeks was expended on dealing with COVID-19 issues, making sure that our staff had the flexibility, tools, and information to continue providing services.

We are working on the celebration for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Commission for the Blind. The celebration is scheduled to be held on Friday afternoon, July 31. This will take place following our quarterly Commission Board meeting.

Kat provided training for the North Platte and Omaha staff on updating policies and procedures. Lincoln and Center staff will be trained when they next have an in-person staff meeting.

Kat worked on updating our Cost Allocation Plan and it was sent to the Department of Education the second week of April.

Total number of OIB clients served at the end of the period was 331.  
Total number of IL under 55 clients served at the end of the period was 62.  
Total number of VR clients served at the end of the period was 427.

We had clients get jobs as:

Billing and Posting Clerk, Building Cleaning Worker, Computer Network Support Specialist, Machine Setter/Operator/Tender, Customer Service Representative, Dishwasher, Farmer/Ranchers/Other Agricultural Manager, Financial Manager, Fine Artist, Healthcare Social Worker, Massage Therapists (2), Media Communicator Worker, Packers and Packagers - Hand, Personal Care Aid, Randolph-Sheppard Operators (2), Registered Nurse, Rehabilitation Counselor, Special Education Teacher - Kindergarten and Elementary School.

## II. Human Resources

We have had a few staff members leave and a few new ones come to the agency in the last few months. Kim Schnitzer, VR counselor from Omaha, left on March 6, and Cheryl Livingston, VR tech from Lincoln retired on March 27. Shelley Ritter from the front desk in Lincoln also left in early April for personal reasons.

Of eight staff members, six are new and two are newly promoted.

New staff members:

Ashley Jackson, VR counselor for the Kearney area  
Aaron Sands, Technology Specialist for the Kearney area  
Julie Thompson, Orientation Counselor position for Norfolk  
Nicole Gothier, Home Management instructor for the Center  
Riley Morton, Accounting Clerk II for the front desk in Lincoln  
Kelly E. Coleman, Technology instructor for the Lincoln District.

New positions:

Eric Buckwalter, NBE coordinator position  
Adrienne Moody, VR counselor position that was vacated by Kim.

Five new staff were scheduled to be in Center Training, but it has been postponed until the COVID-19 is under control.

We still have three positions vacant: an orientation counselor in Omaha vacated by Adrienne, the vocational rehabilitation counselor in Lincoln vacated by Eric, and the part-time front desk position in Lincoln which was vacated by Shelley Ritter. State Personnel has declared a hiring freeze so we have to wait until this is over to advertise and hire for these three positions. This will make a total of nine new staff.

All our training sessions (working with clients with multiple disabilities, techniques to work with newly senior blind and placement, travel for training, and the State Staff meeting) have been postponed due to COVID-19. However, we had a short

virtual State Staff training on April 22, which helped us to keep in touch. The first training item was compassion fatigue, the second was about working with Developmental Disability services, and the third was about usage of our AWARE data system.

Staff also have the opportunity to get some more training remotely.

### III. Field Services:

We canceled our group programs for March, April, and May due to COVID-19. Everyone is working from home. We continue to serve clients remotely.

Counselors called current and former clients to see if they need some extra assistance due to COVID-19. We identified several who needed emotional support, accessibility technology to communicate better during social distancing, and some maintenance checks for groceries.

For older blind clients, counselors are checking in on how they are doing with accessing the phone, staying in contact with family and friends, paying bills, ordering medications, dealing with anxiety because of COVID-19, among other needs.

For students, counselors are providing guidance and ensuring they have working technology for their distance learning.

Staff members have been sharing the Pathways videos with several clients. Consumers are learning skills of blindness by going over those videos together with counselors.

The three districts were instrumental on helping the NBE transition into the vending facilities for the Department of Correctional Services (DCS).

All staff have spent 1:1 time with our staff trainees to provide them with continued skills training while the Center is closed; this is being done remotely.

Until the middle of March, we had group home teaching sessions for people who are older blind and Pre-ETS students. Field staff also continue to network by participating in a number of professional events remotely. Students from NCECBVI came to work with the Lincoln District staff. They made sack lunches and took the bus to East Campus and had ice cream at UNL Dairy store. The partnership with NCECBVI continues to grow strong. The Lincoln District also completed another financial module in Junior Achievement.

Field counselors continue to work with Project Search across the State.

In Omaha, staff had a number of IEP/MDT meetings for students in the surrounding school districts. Many of the school districts hold a family resource night to learn about agencies that support students/families with disabilities.

Omaha counselors worked with our transition students in February to tour “No More Empty Pots and No More Empty Cups”. These are certificate programs for culinary arts and barista. They also did an activity at the Workforce Center on resume development and job hunting.

We had an NFB Career Mentoring program in February with 24 Pre-ETS students. The focus was on work-based learning experiences, which included: Professional Conduct and Workplace Protocol, Effective Informational Interview, Networking as a Job Search Skill, Postsecondary Preparation and more. All the transition and Pre-ETS group activities were postponed due to COVID-19. However, we launched “NCBVI Power Hour”, for high school and college students. This weekly virtual meeting is taking place on Thursdays. The first one was held on April 30.

The college workshop might take place in the Fall and it would focus on the importance of note taking skills, cane travel in college, technology use in college and much more.

Our staff continues to meet with businesses and attend networking events and placement focus meetings across the state. However, this changed with the social distancing guidelines.

#### **IV. Training Center**

The Center has eight students and three are senior blind clients. There are currently five staff trainees. Two commencement meals were canceled due to COVID-19.

Four representatives from the Department of Labor visited the apartments. This allowed them more time to spend with individual students, and discuss resume writing and content.

All staff are using this COVID-19 experience as an opportunity to grow and modernize. We know that these are not ideal rehabilitation conditions, but thanks to our great staff, the Center team is working through these challenging times. Unfortunately, one student did not receive a proper graduation. The Training Center will invite this student back for a ceremony when we return to normal working conditions. The Center staff is currently working with a student whose start date was delayed. Although he has not moved into the apartments, Center instructors are reaching out, providing instruction, and bringing him up to speed. This includes use of technology and braille at home. He will move into the apartments when COVID-19 is under control.

## **V. Nebraska Business Enterprise**

The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) vending machine installation project was completed the week of March 24, 2020. This 94 vending machine project with over 12 different locations was a very large undertaking, but everyone [i.e. NDCS, NCBVI, Greater America Distributing (GAD), Valley Vending Services (VVS), Advanced Breakroom Services (ABS)] worked well together to make it as successful as possible. Carol Jenkins did a tremendous job managing this project. The District supervisors and counselors were also very involved.

Due to COVID-19 most vending and cafeteria facilities were hurt. USSTRATCOM is closed, but the vending machines are operating. We are working with blind licensees to help them as much as we can. As a result, out of their set-aside and allowed by Randolph-Sheppard, each vendor got a check of \$500 for sick leave. Furthermore, we asked the blind operators to open their case (if it is not open) so we can pay for their insurance and eventually for inventory. In addition, we are buying hand sanitizers, gloves, and masks to give to the vendors when going to their sites.

At Corrections, the inmates and guards are buying products from our vending machines. These new facilities will increase income for several vendors. In the past, it was difficult to attract blind vendors to the program because it did not offer enough income. We also could not get new sites because we did not have qualified vendors. Therefore, the program could not grow. However, we are looking for good vending opportunities and when there is not a qualified vendor available, we will subcontract until we find a vendor who we can train and take over.

Carol was successful in working to get the blind vendors under NCBVI's Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for vendors. This is the portion of the permit that was still in negotiation, but I signed it last week. The Worker's Comp policy is helping our vendors to save money.

NCBVI finalized contract negotiations with the Nebraska Department of Transportation to lessen the cost of utilities blind vendors pay for interstate rest areas along I-80. Again, Carol headed this project.

We got an official notice that we will start running the new Veterans Administration (VA) clinic in Omaha for vending machines in August 2020. This was a result of an Arbitration that the agency filed against the VA back in 2019.

Final remarks:

We are facing unprecedented times with lots of unknowns. It is affecting all, our staff and clients. We are all committed to continue providing high quality services

under the circumstances. We will continue to evaluate new innovative ways to achieve our goals. Finally, I want to thank the agency Deputy Directors, the Supervisors, and all line staff for showing unity, dedication and passion in their jobs. During difficult and uncertain times, is when we know what we are made of; and the NCBVI team is showing to be tough!

## Ongoing Business

### Newsline® Update – Kimberly Scherbarth, Outreach Coordinator

This past quarter has brought some unexpected additions to NFB Newsline. With COVID-19 being in the forefront of our daily lives and news, Newsline added two sections of Breaking News Specific to the reporting of news related to COVID-19. This news has been pulled from various news sources and both of these Breaking news sections have been added to all NFB-Newsline subscribers favorites, on the Amazon Alexa platform.

Also, during this quarter, Scott White presented a National Zoom Training on the NFB-Newsline skill on the Amazon Alexa. When reviewing the Excel spreadsheet, you will notice a large increase in the number of subscribers who are starting to choose to use the NFB-Newsline skill on the Amazon Alexa. Scott also provided three training sessions in April to NCBVI staff and center students. One, a general overview of NFB-Newsline, a second more detailed training, with more demonstrations of Newsline on various platforms. The 3<sup>rd</sup> presentation, for NCBVI Center students, was much like the first session held for NCBVI staff. Scott also spent some time focused on the job-search features, provided by accessing NFB-Newsline on the telephone.

The Summer of 2020 will bring yet another creative addition to Newsline related to COVID-19. NFB's BELL Academy will change formats. NFB will be holding BELL Academy, At-Home Edition. BELL will be held during three sessions, each lasting 2 weeks. Students will be provided all of the materials needed through the mail and if the student does not have a computer or internet access, they will be able to access the BELL lessons on NFB-Newsline.

These are some of the highlights from this past quarter. Just a reminder that April's numbers are not available to me until May 1, 2020.

	January	February	March	April
Number of Subscribers:	2059	2063	2064	
New Subscriptions:	5	5	1	

**Telephone Usage:**

Total calls:	869	868	1125
Average call length:	11.21	12.01	11.49
Percent local calls:	34.41	32.31	42.58
Total call minutes:	9744	10424	12922

**Online Usage:**

Web Sessions:	1327	1009	1115
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	300	309	374
NFB-NEWSLINE Alexa Sessions:	4	22	84
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1705	1037	1459
NLS DTB Deliveries :	0	0	0
Podable Deliveries:	0	0	0
Email Deliveries:	292	438	520
Total Online Accesses:	3628	2815	3552

**Total Content Accesses:**

Content Frequency:	10.0 Mins	10.8 Mins	8.93Mins
Nebraska Newspapers:	3032	3490	5011
Nebraska Local Channels:	43	48	60
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	151	165	149
National Newspapers:	528	497	639
International Newspapers:	0	0	0
My Newspaper:	48	41	87
Breaking News Online	61	92	66
Nmagazines:	101	63	39

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

The Client Assistance Program is currently working on one separate case to resolve concerns with the NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). This case is still pending, as CAP has not yet reached resolutions with the client.

### Commissioners Retreat – discuss and act upon the rescheduling of our orientation for the new Commissioners

Due to COVID-19, the original date of the New Commissioner Orientation training was canceled. The commissioners had a discussion about rescheduling the training.

Vice Chair Newman made a motion to schedule a virtual meeting for the New Commissioner Orientation training on June 13, 2020.

Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

### Public Comment

Barbara Loos – Barbara suggested to not call the event for the training a retreat. She said she feels it is best to only refer to it as a New Commissioner Orientation training. Also, she noted that the Governor has stated that Boards and Commissions can now meet virtually because of COVID-19, but how often can this happen?

Chair Bulger noted that the NCBVI Board can meet whenever they deem it necessary. According to State Statute, the Board is required to meet at least four times per year; quarterly.

Jim Jirak – Jim noted that the Governor's Executive Order No 20-03 states that all governing bodies may meet by videoconference or by telephone conferencing through May 31, 2020. It may be extended, but at this time we do not know.

Vice Chair Newman made a motion to change his original motion to state that the New Commissioner Orientation training will be held on May 30, 2020.

Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

Jim Jirak – Jim asked what each commissioner has been up to since the February Commission Board meeting.

Vice Chair Robert Newman stated that he attended the teleconference meeting of the NBE Licensee meeting. He also attended the Friends of the Commission meeting last week. The Friends are trying to get some grants for some of the programs that NCBVI puts on. Currently, they are concentrating on Project Independence (PI). They are also working with two seniors on how to use the iPhone.

Robert noted that he is the vice president of the Nebraska Senior Division of NFB. They have a team who put together a draft of a video that they are going to create. Their team has a monthly meeting. Robert reported that he is also on the National Board in terms of the Senior Division and he is the Secretary of the Omaha Chapter. He is also doing some mentoring on the side.

Kimberly Scherbarth – Kimberly noted that she is the NFB Newsline Coordinator and she is also working on BELL Academy. Kimberly noted that at the University, where she works in Disability Services, they have some students who are blind. With the current remote learning she has developed some resource sheets for them to use for on-line learning.

Becky Rieken – Becky noted that she is a teacher for visually impaired students. She is currently working with her students to help them become successful adults. She has been working with NCECBVI and she always offers the availability of a mentor to her blind students. Becky has also shared information about the Bell Academy with others. Becky asked if she could share the Commission staff contact information with Vision Hub. Director Serván stated that this would be fine since this is public information.

Brent Heyen – Brent reported that he signed up to be a mentor for the National Federation of the Blind Mentor program.

Chairperson Mark Bulger – Mark noted that he currently serves as the ACB State President. They had planned to have their annual State convention on April 16 with the focus being Older Blind. However, due to COVID-19 the convention was canceled. The ACB State convention will be rescheduled for a later date.

The ACB National on-site convention was canceled. This convention will be replaced with a virtual National convention. This convention will be streamed on ACB radio and Zoom.

Mark noted that he is the President of the Omaha Association of the Blind. They have not met for the past two months due to COVID-19. They are doing call blasts, etc. to keep in touch with each other. When needed, they are also pointing people toward resources they may need during this challenging time.

Mark reported that he also serves on a couple of Transportation committees in Omaha. He has been working on the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit committee for the past five or six years. They are getting ready to have a new form of bus transportation that will be faster and easily accessible.

#### Break

A break was taken at 10:54 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11:09 a.m.

## New Business

### Discuss and act upon the reinstatement of the reoccurring agenda item, "Commissioners Report"

Vice Chair Newman reported that this item had been a reoccurring item on the Commissioner Board meeting agenda for quite a while. There came a time when the Board members felt that this item was not necessary for various reasons. There was a vote to remove the item from the agenda and it passed with a 3 to 2 vote.

It has been suggested by a former commissioner, Jim Jirak, to reinstate this item to the agenda as a reoccurring item. The commissioners decided to relook at this, and discuss putting this item back on the agenda as a reoccurring item.

Commissioner Rieken moved to reinstate the "Report from the Commissioners" as a reoccurring item to the Commission Board meeting agenda. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

### Discuss and Act on the approval of the Executive Director's time certification

Commissioner Heyen moved to continue with the current method being used for the Director to submit his Personnel Activity Report to the Board of Commissioners. The Director submits his Personnel Activity Report via email to the entire Board for their review. It is an automatic approval unless a question or concern is raised by a Commission Board member. Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

### Discuss & Act on the Approval of Employee in-state and out-of-state Travel

State law requires all travel of staff of state agencies to be pre-approved. This includes travel in-state and out-of-state. Currently for out-of-state travel all staff must complete a form that says where they are going, why they are going there, the cost, how it will be funded, etc. and this must be pre-approved by their immediate supervisor and by the executive director. This is done by all staff for out-of-state travel.

Supervisors manage in-state travel by getting itineraries from staff and reviewing them on an on-going basis. However, staff is not required to check with their supervisor every morning to get an okay for in-state travel as this would not be manageable. Discussion was held with Administrative Services to determine how the agency could comply with the law regarding in-state travel.

Administrative Services recommended that each year the Board of Commissioners would have a motion to pre-approve travel that is related to the purpose of the staff person's position.

Commissioner Heyen moved that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired Board of Commissioners approves all employee in-state business travel and/or out-of-state business travel within 60 miles of the border of Nebraska in any adjoining state, which relates directly to the provision of services to a client, i.e. employer visit, medical appointment, service referral, employment interview, etc. All other out-of-state business travel is approved if granted approval by the Executive Director of the agency. This motion is in effect until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners after April 1, 2021. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

### Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim thanked the Board for reinstating the “Report from the Commissioners” to the Commission Board meeting agenda.

Nancy Flearl – Nancy thanked the commissioners and NCBVI administration for all the support they have received during this time.

Barbara Loos – Barbara asked how the public will know to rejoin the meeting after the Executive Session. Chair Bulger stated that he will provide a specific time for people to call back into the conference call.

### Typical Final Announcements

The next Quarterly NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be Friday, July 31, 2020 in Lincoln, Nebraska. There are also plans for the NCBVI 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in the afternoon. The Commission Board elections will also be held.

### Executive Session to conduct the Executive Director Annual Evaluation

Commissioner Rieken moved to go into Executive Session at 11:27 a.m. to conduct the annual evaluation of the Executive Director.

(Ref. Open Meeting Act; 84-1410. Closed session; (d) Evaluation of the job performance of a person when necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting.)

Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all Commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Newman moved to come out of Executive Session at 12:32 p.m. Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all Commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Act on the retention of the Executive Director and his Salary

Commissioner Scherbarth moved to retain Carlos Serván as the Executive Director of NCBVI. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Heyen moved to give the Executive Director a 2.3% raise effective July 1, 2020.

Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:36 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the July 31, 2020 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,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant  
NCBVI

Mark Bulger, Chairperson  
NCBVI Board of Commissioners

## NCBVI Staff Reports

### Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Cheryl Livingston retired from the agency on March 27, 2020. We already miss her. We had to postpone her retirement celebration until after social distancing has ended. Shelley Ritter left the agency. Supervision of the front desk has shifted to the Business office.

We hired Kelly E Coleman for the Technology Specialist position in Lincoln. She started on April 13, 2020. She will attend Center training when the Center reopens. She is providing technology and braille instruction to staff trainees by Face Time. She is working from home. Eric Buckwalter has been promoted to NBE Coordinator. Eric has been a valued member of our team and we are excited about this opportunity for him. We will wait to hire for his position until the Center reopens.

We had a number of vendors that expanded their vending sites at Corrections. We supported the NBE staff in this transition. We assisted a client to become a vendor.

We hosted the students from NCECBVI this quarter. They came to the office and made sack lunches. They took the bus to East Campus and had ice cream at UNL Dairy store.

We held a group home teaching with OIB. We also held a training session for Pre-Ets. We completed another financial module in Junior Achievement and made lunch.

We canceled our group programs in March and April due to COVID- 19. Everyone is working from home. We continue to serve clients remotely.

### Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

Kim's Schnitzer's last day was March 6, 2020. Kim returned to work at Corrections in their Behavioral Health Services to work on hours for her LMHP.

Adrienne Moody was hired for the VR counselor position that was vacated by Kim Schnitzer. We are working with Shared Services to hire someone for the Orientation Counselor I position. Adrienne has been spending time with VR Counselor's and shadowing them and getting to know her caseload. She has hit the ground running with her new responsibilities and will be wonderful!

There were a number of Project Search meetings for information night, skills assessment days, etc.

Staff had a number of IEP/MDT meetings for students in the surrounding school districts. Many of the school districts hold a family resource night to learn about agencies that support students/families with disabilities. We did attend the Millard and Papillion School Districts. Gretna and Elkhorn then canceled due to COVID-19. Information about agencies that were to attend was to be disseminated to families.

Tim, Kelly, Adrienne worked with our transition students in February to tour “No More Empty Pots and No More Empty Cups”. They are certificate programs for culinary arts and barista. They also did an activity at the Workforce Center on resume development and job fair.

Kathy, along with all her work with clients, assisted in a testing meeting with Alliance regarding how AWARE is working for her as a counselor.

All staff have been working remotely.

Adrienne has been working on the NCBVI 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee.

Tim Jefferson has continued to attend in person and virtually placement meetings. He has also been working on the committee to plan the Employment Conference along with Cristal Dimas, David DeNotaris and myself. This was scheduled to occur July 7-9, 2020 in Omaha. We are hoping to reschedule for September 1-3, 2020. They have already created a flyer, promotional video and draft agenda.

Kelly Coleman has been working Calvin Crest on a Contract and dates for Project Independence. With this being canceled we will be discussing what we will be putting in place for students over the summer.

Counselors have been in regular contact with all their clients. They have been looking at all their needs at this time. For students, counselors are ensuring that they have working technology for their distance learning and they are checking on how that is all working for them.

For older blind clients, counselors are checking in on how they are doing with accessing the phone, staying in contact with family and friends, paying bills, ordering medications, etc. Counselors are also checking to see if they have any other technology needs.

Staff have been doing virtual trainings in skills of blindness, rehab technology, group meetings on leadership and advocacy. They will also be attending sessions on exercise and wellness. Staff have been sharing webinar's and information regarding available technology. Therefore, clients are continuing to learn and grow. We have purchased independent living items and technology to

be delivered and we have conducted distance training on these items. We have been sharing the pathways videos and going through the skills addressed with clients learning skills of blindness. The list could go on.

This quarter Larry worked with setting up computers for new staff members. He also assisted staff with technology as they began working from home. Most recently, he has been working to assist staff in accessing Webex and researching the accessibility of other acceptable resources.

We continue to have Webex and other meetings with Workforce Partners, HR representatives, community resources, etc.

We have shared all the information about opportunities that are available at this time with NFB, Lighthouse, AFB, and ACB. We were sent links to the virtual conventions in July for ACB and NFB.

We have also worked this quarter with NBE and the local blind licensees as there were changes with how vendors exit the program, and then, COVID-19 creating havoc.

I am honored to work with such an amazing group of creative individuals!

#### North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

The North Platte District welcomed two new staff members during this time; Ashley Jackson was hired as the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the district, and she will be located in Holdrege and serve clients in West Central Nebraska. Aaron Sands was hired as the Technology Specialist for the North Platte district and will serve the whole territory. The North Platte district has changed from having traditional office boundaries to being flexible and counselors traveling to areas when there is the need. This keeps caseloads balanced and serves clients more quickly and efficiently. The teamwork of the counselors has been outstanding and we are excited about the direction we are heading.

Networking: Angie teamed up with Nebraska Workforce staff to maximize services that can be provided to a shared client. Fritz provided a presentation at Kearney Manor and presented at a Stepping On Fall Prevention class for the older blind populations. Cristal has participated in the EmployKrnny meetings and was involved in Project Search for Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney. Cristal also made business connections at North Platte Walmart and Credit Management. Erin was involved in EmployNP meetings and two Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board meetings. The district had the Department of Labor present to a Pre-Ets group meeting.

Projects: The North Platte district had planned a Group Home OIB Teaching for the first week. We then started needing to make COVID-19 adjustment so the meeting did not happen, but the staff worked hard on preparing arrangements prior to the cancellation. Cristal and Erin have been working on a business plan for a client. All staff have spent 1:1 time with our staff trainees to provide them with continued skills training while the Center is closed; primarily done over Face Time.

Training: All staff took advantage of the additional time in the office to participate in many Webinars to increase their skills while having additional office time.

Client Outcomes: Angie had a client she has worked closely with on his GED to start the testing portion of the process. Cristal has two clients in Center training and one additional client took a tour of the Center. She also had one client gain employment with NCBVI as a technology specialist.

#### Center Activity Report – Greg DeWall

Currently: 8 Students

5 students are VR

3 Students are Older Blind

There are currently 5 staff trainees. Aaron Sands, Ashley Jackson, Kelly Coleman, Nicole Gothier, and Julie Thompson.

2 Three Day Stays

2 commencement meals canceled, due to COVID-19

Tours: 3 tours with agency consumers, no tours with State Senators or other government officials.

Observations: No observations this quarter.

Volunteer Activities: 2 volunteer events canceled due to Covid-19. The by-annual cleaning of the Children's Museum will be rescheduled and the Boy Scouts of America activity day will also be rescheduled.

#### Student Requested Activities:

Guest Speakers: Jazmine Smith, from the Department of Labor (DOL), has come monthly, until this quarter. In February, she and 3 other representatives from the DOL visited the apartments. This allowed them more time to spend with individual students, and discuss resume writing and content.

#### Center Staff:

Center Supervisor: I am happy to report we have hired a new Home-Management instructor. Nicole Gothier will be taking over her duties in their

entirety after completing her staff training at the Center. Due to COVID-19, Nicole has not been able to receive 40 hours a week of shade training. All staff are trying to use this COVID-19 experience as an opportunity to grow and modernize. I am working closely with staff and students to remain in communications and provide support as needed. I recognize these are not ideal rehabilitation conditions, but thanks to a great staff, the Center team is working through these challenging times.

Additional Notes: Unfortunately, one student did not receive a proper graduation. The Nebraska Center for the Blind will invite this student back for a ceremony, when we return to normal working conditions. The center staff is currently working with a student whose start date was delayed. Although he has not moved into the apartments, Center instructors are reaching out, providing instruction, and bringing him up to speed. This includes use of technology and braille at home. He will move into the apartments when the health scare is gone.

The Center currently has 8 students. There are no students who need one-on-one attention. This allows for students to be more evenly spread out in classes, and get the necessary attention from instructors. We are looking forward to training returning to normal, but until then, we will provide relevant and purposeful training to Nebraska blind consumers.

The total number of students attending the Center does not include staff trainees because they do not stay in the Center apartments. We have 10 Center apartments; and therefore, 10 students can attend the Center regardless of how many staff trainees we have. Nebraska consumers always have priority when attending the Center when it comes to consumers from other states.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Carol Jenkins

### **Vending Sites Update**

#### **Nebraska Department of Correctional Services**

The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) vending machine installation project was completed the week of March 24, 2020. This 94 vending machine project over 12 different locations was a very large undertaking, but everyone (i.e. NDCS, NCBVI, Greater America Distributing (GAD), Valley Vending Services (VVS), Advanced Breakroom Services (ABS), and such) worked well together to make it as successful as possible. Everyone involved was very pleased with the level of coordination, communication, procedures, and hard work, which made it a success.

#### **Nebraska State Building Division**

NCBVI is still in permit negotiations with the Nebraska State Building Division (NSBD). Carol Jenkins has worked with Nebraska State Risk Management and has obtained a group general liability insurance policy for the NBE program,

which lessens the cost of insurance for blind vendors. Carol is now working to get the blind vendors under NCBVI's Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for vendors. This is the portion of the permit still being negotiated with NSBD. The Worker's Comp policy is now in the draft stage of the process where all of the details are being negotiated for accuracy. Once a permit has been fully executed, Carol will set up a training for relevant NCBVI staff, NBE Staff, and blind vendors who will be responsible for carrying out the permit.

#### Nebraska Department of Transportation

Carol has been working with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) on negotiating new rates for utilities for each rest area along the interstate. Currently, interstate rest area utilities are \$35 for one machine, \$45 for two machines, \$65 for three machines and \$80 for four machines per each rest area. Carol is working to negotiate a flat rate of \$35 per month for each rest area regardless of the number of machines. NCBVI is waiting on NDOT legal department to determine if everything meets state and federal laws for the highway system. Carol will provide more information as it becomes available.

#### US StratCom Cafeteria

The US StratCom cafeteria has been closed since March 23, 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic. This situation will continue to be evaluated.

#### NBE Licensee Update

The NBE program had one licensee leave the program to pursue employment in another state, which allowed another licensee to take on a vending facility. The NBE Program also has one new trainee who took over a vending site for a licensee who retired. There are currently 14 licensed blind vendors operating vending facilities with one new trainee in the NBE program currently operating a vending facility.

#### Vending Site Complaints

The categories of complaints that have come in to NCBVI this quarter have been as follows: blind vendors having expired products and having machines not properly stocked. This is a reminder that NCBVI has all of the contracts with the various owners of facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind consumers, and NCBVI statewide.

#### Additional Information

##### Operator Agreements and Fixed Assets

The NBE Licensee Committee has passed the proposed amendments to the NBE Operator Agreement. Carol submitted the NBE Operator Agreement to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for approval. RSA approved the new NBE Operator Agreement on January 28, 2020. Dave Robinson has been working on updating NBE fixed assets statewide. Once Dave has an accurate list of NBE fixed assets, Dave will update each licensee's operator agreement, which

will include a machine layout for each vending site as well as the newly RSA approved operator agreement language for signatures.

### COVID-19 Agency Support

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NCBVI is supporting blind vendors who re-open their vocational rehabilitation (VR) case or already have an open VR case with NCBVI in order to retain and maintain their current employment in the following ways:

1. Beginning in March 2020, no set-aside will be collected. NCBVI will keep monitoring the situation and will notify blind vendors when set-aside will resume.
2. Support for re-start up product for a first fill of vending machines and such once social distancing is over.
3. Support for one month of paying for a reader/driver not to exceed \$12 per hour
4. Support for up to three months of NDOT interstate and USSTRATCOM Vending facilities for utility payments.
5. Support for up to three months of group general liability insurance assistance if and only if it is truly needed. NCBVI strongly prefers deferring payment to NCBVI because the deadline is September 30, 2020.
6. The possibility of a Fair Minimum Return or sick pay from set-aside is being explored and researched. The NBE Committee passed a one-time \$500 payment for sick pay for each blind vendor operating a vending site from set-aside funds.
7. Beginning in March 2020, money owed to the agency for past-due set-aside, NDOT utilities, re-payments, late fees, and any other past-due reason will be deferred until social distancing is over.
8. P&Ls and all proper, complete, and necessary documentation is still postmarked and due by the 20th of the month.

To be eligible for any of the above support, you must have an open case with the agency to request and/or receive any support. For questions and assistance with services, please call NCBVI at 402-471-2891.

### NBE Coordinator Position

NCBVI is happy to announce that Eric Buckwalter has been hired as the new NBE Coordinator. Eric will begin his new position with NCBVI on April 27, 2020.

### NBE Vendor and NCBVI Staff Training

NCBVI is once again looking at training for blind vendors and agency staff on vending machines and such. However, NCBVI is not sure what this will look like at this time due to other NBE priorities.

### Looking Ahead

NCBVI has no plans to expand the NBE Program at this time. However, NCBVI will continue to work on previously agreed to projects for the NBE Program such

as the new Veteran's Administration buildings in Lincoln and Omaha. NCBVI has set aside some reallocation funds to purchase new vending machines for some current locations where machines need replaced. NCBVI will also be purchasing credit card readers for all new and existing vending machines where appropriate and allowable because research has shown credit card sales account for over half of all sales for vending facilities. New vending machines and credit card readers for new and existing machines will begin to happen once the Corrections project is complete. In addition, NCBVI is still looking into the accessibility of Cantaloupe software for inventory management for vending facilities.

#### Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

This past quarter, I have worked on the following projects:

- Trained North Platte and Omaha staff on updating policies and procedures. Lincoln and Center staff will be trained when they next have an in-person staff meeting.
- Worked on updating Cost Allocation Plan.
- Took over supervision of the front desk on March 30. Hired Riley Morton to replace Cheryl Livingston upon her retirement. The part time front desk person resigned without notice, and the state has declared a hiring freeze so the Business Office is covering for that position until we can hire.
- Continued working on the reorganization of Business Office, continuing training the new Accountant I (Michelle Rogers), and Accounting Clerk I (Brandy Harper). Continue planning for how to maximize efficiency and internal controls with only Michelle, Brandy and I involved. This is a major challenge and still a work in progress.
- Work on procurement of vending equipment for Corrections.
- Had cell phone boosters installed to improve reception within the headquarters building.
- Continue work on redesigning financial reports to simplify data entry, ensure better accuracy, and provide the right level of detail for a variety of users.
- Hired a construction company to build a wall separating the student lounge into a small lounge and an office for Greg DeWall
- Working on finding temporary wall solutions to separate the office shared by Mike and Jeff and to separate the Lincoln District computer lab into a smaller office and storage.
- Worked on researching past Program Income balances to determine their origin and use.

Kathy Stephens –

I worked on the surplus of additional vending machines, office furniture and technology that were non-working. I also worked on sending some surplus items to State Surplus for sale.

I worked on cancelling staff travel arrangements and registrations for several different conventions, conferences and trainings that were canceled due to COVID-19.

I worked with TSB to get four additional vehicles added to our fleet. Due to COVID-19, TSB came to our Lincoln location to disinfect our Lincoln state vehicles.

I sent out "Save the Dates" for the NCBVI 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

I attended the Public Hearing for the WIOA Combined State Plan and I assisted with entering the NCBVI portion of the Plan into the portal.

I attended a non-code agency meeting regarding the Open Meeting Act.

I participated on the interview team for the Accounting Clerk II position.

