

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Board Meeting
May 2, 2009; 9:00 a.m.
Columbus, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Nancy Oltman, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Oltman informed the public that in 2000 the Nebraska Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired was established as a separate agency. The governing board of the commission consists of five members appointed by the Governor with the approval of a majority of the members of the Legislature. All board members shall have reasonable knowledge or experience in issues related to blindness which may include, but is not limited to, reasonable knowledge or experience acquired through membership in consumer organizations of the blind. No board member or his or her immediate family shall be a current employee of the commission. At least three board members shall be blind persons: One member shall be a member or designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; one member shall be a member or designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska; and one member may be a member of another consumer organization of the blind.

The Commissioners hire and evaluate an Executive Director who oversees the staff of the Commission. Today the commissioners will conduct the annual evaluation of the executive director and there will be no Focus Topic.

Announcements Concerning Public Comments, Meeting Recordings, Lunch Arrangements and other Logistics:

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made. It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Everyone will be on their own for lunch. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was located on the back table in the meeting room. The Act was available in both print and Braille format.

Commissioners present: Darrell Walla, Jim Jirak, Julie Johnson, Carol Jenkins and Nancy Oltman.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director, IL, Lincoln; Carlos Servan, Deputy Director, VR, Lincoln; Glenn Ervin, Orientation Counselor, Norfolk; John Schmitt, Vocational Counselor, Norfolk; and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln.

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, Lincoln; Dan Bird, Plattsmouth; Sylvester Starzek, Columbus; Marvin Nelson, Columbus; Zetha Nelson, Columbus; Penny Golden, Columbus; Gwynne Widhalm, Norfolk; Debbie Mauer, Norfolk; Linda Humor, Columbus; Janis Shafer, Lincoln; Merna Hansen, Hastings; Shirley Schmidt, Columbus; Rita Cunningham, Columbus; Bryce Mellen, Columbus.

Minutes of February 7, 2009 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the February 7, 2009 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Evaluation of the Executive Director and Review of Staff Surveys

Chairman Oltman noted that an on-line evaluation form was developed and used this year. The commissioners developed the survey questions and format of the survey and Kathy worked with Nebraska.Gov to put the survey on-line. Chairman Oltman noted that the survey was very easy to use.

Below are the results of the survey. Comments from discussion during this meeting are inserted after some items; an asterisk (*) will precede that text.

NCBVI Staff Survey

As an employee of NCBVI, the Board of Commissioners values and appreciates your honest feedback. Therefore, you are encouraged to take a few minutes to complete this short survey for the board of commissioners. As we understand the importance of anonymity, we have taken steps to absolutely ensure all responses provided will be confidential. An anonymous compilation will be provided to the executive director for his or her review. Your answers will assist the Board of Commissioners to ensure employee satisfaction, Executive Director performance and excellent consumer services.

Part A: Evaluation of Executive Director Performance

The below ten statements will be used by the Board of Commissioners to evaluate the performance of the Executive Director in conjunction with the Board assessments. Your input assists us to make decisions concerning salary, retention of the Executive Director and other concerns.

Please use the scale: 5 Outstanding; 4 Above Average; 3 Satisfactory; 2 Needs Improvement; 1 Unacceptable to respond to the following statements.


1. The executive director believes that it is respectable to be blind.

Overall Score: 4.8

5 Outstanding





 38.7%

(12)

4 Above Average	 6.5%	(2)
3 Satisfactory		(0)
2 Needs Improvement		(0)
1 Unacceptable		(0)





2. The executive director listens to concerns from staff.

Overall Score: 3.8

5 Outstanding	 16.1%	(5)
4 Above Average	 16.1%	(5)
3 Satisfactory	 6.5%	(2)
2 Needs Improvement	 6.5%	(2)
1 Unacceptable		(0)



3. The executive director responds to concerns from staff.

Overall Score: 3.6

5 Outstanding	 12.9%	(4)
4 Above Average	 19.4%	(6)
3 Satisfactory	 3.2%	(1)
2 Needs Improvement	 6.5%	(2)
1 Unacceptable		(0)



4. The executive director listens to concerns from consumers.

Overall Score: 4.6

5 Outstanding	 29.0%	(9)
4 Above Average	 16.1%	(5)
3 Satisfactory		(0)
2 Needs Improvement		(0)
1 Unacceptable		(0)




5. The executive director responds to concerns from consumers.

Overall Score: 4.5

5 Outstanding	 22.6%	(7)
4 Above Average	 22.6%	(7)
3 Satisfactory		(0)
2 Needs Improvement		(0)
1 Unacceptable		(0)





6. The executive director identifies priorities.

Overall Score: 3.8

5 Outstanding	 12.9%	(4)
4 Above Average	 16.1%	(5)
3 Satisfactory	 16.1%	(5)
2 Needs Improvement		(0)
1 Unacceptable		(0)



7. The executive director ensures that identified priorities become completed tasks.

Overall Score: 3.8

5 Outstanding	 9.7%	(3)
4 Above Average	 22.6%	(7)
3 Satisfactory	 9.7%	(3)
2 Needs Improvement	 3.2%	(1)
1 Unacceptable		(0)

8. The executive director negotiates creatively to hire quality staff.




Overall Score: 3.8

5 Outstanding	 12.9%	(4)
4 Above Average	 9.7%	(3)

3 Satisfactory	 16.1%	(5)
2 Needs Improvement	 6.5%	(2)
1 Unacceptable		(0)


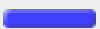

9. The executive director negotiates creatively to fund exemplary service delivery.

Overall Score: 4.0

5 Outstanding	 12.9%	(4)
4 Above Average	 25.8%	(8)
3 Satisfactory		(0)
2 Needs Improvement	 6.5%	(2)
1 Unacceptable		(0)

10. The executive director delivers progressive steps toward true equality for blind Nebraskans.

Overall Score: 4.2



5 Outstanding	 19.4%	(6)
4 Above Average	 19.4%	(6)
3 Satisfactory	 6.5%	(2)
2 Needs Improvement		(0)
1 Unacceptable		(0)

Part B: NCBVI Employee Satisfaction



The following 24 questions are used by the Board of Commissioners to evaluate job satisfaction at NCBVI. The results are used to identify strengths, weaknesses and most importantly to implement changes that will make NCBVI a better place to work.

Please use the scale: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree in response to the following statements.




11. I like working for NCBVI.

5 Strongly Agree	 22.6%	(7)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)



12. I have the training and support I need to do my job.

5 Strongly Agree	 9.7%	(3)
4 Agree	 32.3%	(10)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)





13. I understand what my job responsibilities are.

5 Strongly Agree	 22.6%	(7)
4 Agree	 16.1%	(5)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)





14. I understand the objectives of NCBVI.

5 Strongly Agree	 29.0%	(9)
4 Agree	 12.9%	(4)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




15. If I have a problem I feel I can go to my supervisor for help.

5 Strongly Agree	 12.9%	(4)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)

16. I feel that I can go to the executive director with a problem.

5 Strongly Agree	 12.9%	(4)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)



17. There is a system at NCBVI for me to make suggestions.

5 Strongly Agree	 16.1%	(5)
4 Agree	 22.6%	(7)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




* Chairman Oltman reported that NCBVI has an On-line Staff Suggestion Box in which that staff can make anonymous suggestions. These suggestions go directly to the Chairman of NCBVI. The on-line suggestion box is tested periodically to ensure that it is working in light of functionality problems that have occurred in the past.

* Van Zandt added that NCBVI also has a physical suggestion box located in the client lounge at the Center. Staff and clients are able to submit their suggestions here as well. This suggestion box is checked on a weekly basis. Van Zandt added that staff, and any member of the public, can send an email to the Commission Board at any time.




18. I know how to contact the NCBVI Board of Commissioners.

5 Strongly Agree	 32.3%	(10)
4 Agree	 9.7%	(3)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)





19. I understand the role of the Board of Commissioners.

5 Strongly Agree	 29.0%	(9)
4 Agree	 9.7%	(3)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




20. The executive director demonstrates equal opportunity for the Blind.

5 Strongly Agree	 32.3%	(10)
4 Agree	 6.5%	(2)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




21. The executive director sets the right goals for NCBVI.

5 Strongly Agree	 16.1%	(5)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




22. The executive director sets the right priorities for NCBVI.

5 Strongly Agree	 16.1%	(5)
4 Agree	 22.6%	(7)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




23. The executive director is a good manager.

5 Strongly Agree	 12.9%	(4)
4 Agree	 22.6%	(7)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




24. The executive director is a hard worker.

5 Strongly Agree	 29.0%	(9)
4 Agree	 9.7%	(3)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)




25. The executive director seeks in put from the staff.

5 Strongly Agree	 19.4%	(6)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)






26. The executive director is fair.

5 Strongly Agree	 16.1%	(5)
4 Agree	 25.8%	(8)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree		(0)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)

27. If there is a dispute with the Public, I trust the Executive Director to listen to all sides and make a reasoned decision.




5 Strongly Agree	 19.4%	(6)
4 Agree	 19.4%	(6)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)


28. Promotions at NCBVI are based on qualifications.

5 Strongly Agree	 6.5%	(2)
4 Agree	 16.1%	(5)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 12.9%	(4)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree	 6.5%	(2)




* Director Van Zandt noted that promotions do not happen very often at NCBVI because we have a very low turnover rate.

29. I think that NCBVI is run efficiently.





5 Strongly Agree	 6.5%	(2)
4 Agree	 16.1%	(5)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 19.4%	(6)

2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)

30. NCBVI is on the right track.

5 Strongly Agree	 6.5%	(2)
4 Agree	 22.6%	(7)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 16.1%	(5)
2 Disagree		(0)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)

31. NCBVI has a good budget process.

5 Strongly Agree	 6.5%	(2)
4 Agree	 16.1%	(5)
3 Neither Agree or Disagree	 16.1%	(5)
2 Disagree	 3.2%	(1)
1 Strongly Disagree		(0)

* Bob Deaton noted that last year NCBVI made a concerted effort to get more funding for Older Blind. Some staff did not agree with this. It is impossible to always make decisions that will satisfy everyone.

* Carlos Servan noted that several years ago, Van Zandt very wisely asked the supervisors and staff what the priorities should be for NCBVI. Several discussions relative to priorities took place at State Staff meetings.

32. If you could change one thing at NCBVI, what would it be?

Response

- 1 Better Accountability of consumers who do not follow through with their Rehab. and/or IL plans. So many staff hours are spent trying to locate or work with people who are not ready or wish to continue with services.

* Carlos Servan noted that if all clients followed through and did as they were expected, our jobs would be very easy. Sometimes it takes a few years of working with a client before it clicks for them. We are professionals and we need to deal with clients on an individual basis.

* Commissioner Johnson suggested conducting additional training for staff on how to deal with this.

* Van Zandt stated that some clients are really not ready for vocational rehabilitation because they have not yet gotten use to blindness. NCBVI continues to look for ways to help staff work through these difficult situations.

1 Better communication with each district office.

* Chairman Oltman noted that with offices widespread throughout Nebraska, communication is an ongoing issue.

* Van Zandt stated that NCBVI continues to work on communication.

* Commissioner Johnson stated that perhaps eForce will help with communication about clients. Van Zandt agreed that it should.

1 Equal access to technology and training for all staff.

* Van Zandt stated that NCBVI grants almost all requests from staff for training. Van Zandt added that we are currently offering additional training for support staff. Staff had some exposure to new technology at the April State Staff meeting. Van Zandt added that staff needs to inform their supervisor of any training they would like.

* Carlos Servan noted that staff needs to be assertive and ask for the training that they need.

1 Extra work is compensated.

* Van Zandt noted that NCBVI must follow the Labor Contract and the State Personnel Rules and Regulations regarding compensation. NCBVI may offer overtime pay or compensation time for hours worked if over 40 hours per week. However, this must be preapproved by the supervisor.

* Chairman Oltman stated that she felt that this comment was not specific enough.

1 Have two permanent full time counselors in North Platte.

* Van Zandt noted that the orientation counselor position in the North Platte is officially a part-time position; however, it has been temporarily funded until September 2011 as full time using stimulus funds.

- 1 I would encourage employees to work towards specific goals, especially improving communication from supervisors to subordinates.

* Commissioner Johnson noted that staff needs to be assertive and ask questions also.

- 1 That blind and sighted staff were treated equally. I feel very strongly that blind staff is virtually always treated with deference and does not do the same tasks sighted staff is asked to--especially manual things. Included are cleaning, carrying, scraping ice, shoveling etc. Also there are many times when blind staff are picked up at their homes by drivers and taken to the initial work site. This is never an option for sighted staff.

* It was noted that additional information would be needed in order to adequately respond to this comment. The commissioners questioned as to when staff were doing tasks such as cleaning, carrying, scraping ice, and shoveling. It was noted that drivers usually scrape ice off the state vehicles before they drive them, but there is only one ice scraper in the vehicles.

* Perhaps blind staff are picked up at their homes and taken to the initial work site by drivers when it is on their way. Does sighted staff ever ask for a ride?

- 1 The way some Supervisors address problems they have with other staff. Jumping the chain rather than trying to resolve the problem with the staff member first. Very, very unprofessional and damages relationships.

* The commissioners noted that it again appears that communication is the core issue.

- 1 VR Deputy director.

* The commissioners noted that this comment was not specific enough to respond to.

- 1 We're getting too soft. Bring back hard-core blindness independence training and philosophy. By this, I mean not bailing our clients out with drivers, maintaining records and resumes for them, etc. Whatever happened to personal responsibility?

* Van Zandt stated that NCBVI can certainly look into this.

* Commissioner Johnson noted that it is part of NCBVI's training to teach clients how to do these things and get training. If clients could already do

these things by themselves, they would not need training.

- 1 Would like some updated office equipment to make our jobs more efficient. However, I realize this is not always possible given the budget.

* The commissioners had no comments. The staff comment answered its own comment.

- 1 Would like to see outcome feedback from Employment Seminars, such as who received an interview, who received a job offer, and have the client develop a written Employment Plan very soon after attendance to help them keep focused on their Employment Goal. Maybe the Employment Plan could be a condition or criteria for attendance at the seminar. Would like to know how the Center outcome percentages are arrived at. What criteria are used to determine these percentages and what is the definition of "outcome." How many are successful VR closures versus unsuccessful VR closures for clients who attended the Center as compared to field staff training.

* Director Van Zandt stated that clients who succeed as a result of Center training is a success as a result of field training because clients do not get to the Center without work in the field first and in the field after. Many clients who finish Center training go on to college or other job search processes. Therefore, it is a combination of Center training and field training.

* Any consumer who is interested in attending Employment Seminars can attend.

* Commissioner Johnson said that a client's exposure to the Employment Seminars is important even if they do not get a job right away as a result of their attendance. Some clients who attend are not employment ready. However, after attendance at three or so seminars they should have a Plan.

* Director Van Zandt stated that more to the point is that we would not tell clients they could not come anymore, but we would ask the counselor what NCBVI is doing with this client and what are we not doing. Voc. Rehab. Is not just an ongoing service, it is supposed to be a process that a person goes through: learning, adapting, adopting and completing an Employment Plan.

A break was taken at 10:35 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:47 a.m.

Public Comment was moved to this portion of the agenda because some of the public indicated that they would soon have to leave the meeting.

Public Comment:

Shirley Schmidt – Shirley stated that she is the contact person for the Columbus Chapter of VIPS. She said their Chapter is struggling because they have no leadership. They currently meet quarterly. They are having a problem with their sidewalks in Columbus. The VIPS group has become an advocate for new sidewalks. Shirley thanked the Board and Commission for helping blind people. She is 80 years old and has a job. Shirley expressed sincere thanks to counselors John Schmitt and Glenn Ervin for the assistance they have provided to her.

Marv Nelson – Marv thanked John Schmitt and Glenn Ervin for all that they have done for him. They have done a great job. He is currently 85 years old.

The Commissioners thanked the public for their comments.

33. What is the best feature about working at NCBVI?

Commissioner Walla read through the comments from the staff.

Response

- 1 Being a part of a team that offers skills and training to enable consumers to be independent participating citizens in their home and community.
- 1 Clients and coworkers
- 1 First of all, Kudos to this survey. It is very well done! I like the fact that I learn something new each day and NCBVI encourages its staff to keep learning and supports staff whenever it is feasible.
- 1 Flexibility, making a difference in people's lives, I now have a supervisor who actually treats me as an adult and trusts me to do my job.
- 1 Helping to change and empower the lives of my clients. Watching them grow, mature and be the full participating members of society I know they can/should be.
- 1 My job duties and serving client's needs.
- 1 NCBVI offers staff a lot of opportunity to learn new things.
- 1 Overall, the environment that Pearl has created is great. Not many places, be they private or public sector, invite the participation and suggestions

that Pearl does and that isn't easy with 51 different personalities.


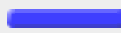

1 seeing how the impact of training and a positive outlook on blindness can change a person's life

1 Stong creative team that works here. The strong belief in blindness and client choice.

1 Team of Co-workers

1 The people who work at NCBVI care about their work, their clients, and their co-workers. I enjoy working in such a positive and productive environment.

34. I believe the feedback I provided today is valued and appreciated.

Strongly Agree	 12.9%	(4)
Agree	 25.8%	(8)
Neither Agree or Disagree	 6.5%	(2)
Disagree		(0)
Strongly Disagree		(0)

Overall Total Score: 4.32

The Board of Commissioners offered their individual comments relative to the performance of the Executive Director.

Commissioner Jenkins – I give a big stamp of approval to the work of the executive director. I have no complaints.

Commissioner Jirak – The environment at NCBVI has improved with the leadership of the current executive director. The executive director is doing a fine job.

Commissioner Oltman – I always receive quick and efficient assistance from the executive director and the staff when needed. NCBVI offers a feeling of openness in its working environment. The work of the executive director is well above satisfactory.

Commissioner Johnson – I agree with all the previous comments of the commissioners. The executive director does a very good job. The structure of NCBVI is very complicated and the executive director does an excellent job in keeping everything well

organized and everything is always well thought out. I would like to see some new methods on ways for communication at NCBVI. Perhaps NCBVI could offer training to staff on communication and assertiveness. NCBVI does have excellent results with their clients.

Commissioner Walla – I am very impressed with the work of the executive director. Her dialogue with consumer groups is very good. I am pleased that she attends consumer conventions and that she attends both the ACB and NFB State and National conventions. I find it disconcerting the number of staff who completed the survey.

It was the consensus of the commissioners that next year they will give staff additional time to complete the survey and send out frequent reminders.

Out of a possible 5 points, the Commissioner's gave Pearl an average of 4.33 for her evaluation over the past year. Commissioner Walla moved to retain Pearl Van Zandt as Executive Director for the next fiscal year. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Walla moved to give the executive director a 3.5% raise to be effective July 1, 2009. Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Report from the Chairman:

Chairman Oltman thanked all NCBVI staff for their work. Oltman thanked the executive director for answering questions from the board after hours and on the weekends. She thanked Kathy Stephens for answering her questions so quickly and she also thanked the supervisors and the counselors for all of their work. Oltman noted that NCBVI staff work great together as a team and everyone should be commended for their great work. Oltman stated that the commissioners receive a lot of reports from staff of NCBVI and she truly appreciates everything she receives.

The Commission had received several complaints from consumers who had been working at Outlook Nebraska in Omaha. The complaints were relative to issues of safety and concerns about how blind people were treated. The Commission Board made the decision that the board and several staff members would take a tour of the business.

Chairperson Oltman stated that after the tour, some of her questions were answered and some were not. Oltman noted that she still sees room for improvement. The Omaha District Supervisor is keeping an eye on what is going on at Outlook Nebraska. The Commission requested a report from the supervisor at the November 2009 Commission Board meeting.

Chairperson Oltman reported that she sat in on a RSA Conference Call regarding stimulus funds. Oltman noted that the discussion was somewhat confusing to her; however, some very good questions were brought up.

Networking group will meet via conference call on Monday evening, May 4, 2009. The usage of stimulus funds will be discussed during this call. Chairman Oltman noted that generally representatives from Virginia, Missouri and Nebraska participate regularly. At the last call, representatives from Illinois, Alaska, and Michigan were also present. Chairman Oltman stated that it is helpful to have more participants because you learn from each other.

Executive Director Report:

Van Zandt verbally gave highlights of her report and she thanked the Commissioners for their time. The entire report of the Executive Director is to be placed in the minutes, so it is inserted below. Director Van Zandt noted for the record that a print copy or Braille copy can be made available to anyone who requests.

May 2009 Executive Director's Report

The State Plan is nearly complete, in draft form. We will fine tune based on discussions today. We now complete it online, did not have access at first, now have it. The application is disjointed with fields for entering sections, but not in the text format that our plan is developed and written. It will take additional work to make sure the correct portions of the documents are inputted. Some will likely need to be revised to fit the way it is set up online.

We received funds from ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) and have been working diligently on creative thinking, reporting requirements, best usage of the funds to meet the ARRA goals. More on that in a later section of the meeting.

Since February, 2009, we have received \$227,000 in Social Security Reimbursement funds. Counselors continue to do a good job investing in our clients and helping them to achieve employment in quality jobs with good pay.

We are working with Voc Rehab in several areas: 1. Contracting with Project Search to do job development and job coaching at hospitals in Scottsbluff, Kearney, Grand Island, and possibly, Lincoln. 2. An initiative with State of Nebraska Personnel to advance the hiring of people with disabilities to state jobs. 3. Training our mutual counselors about serving people with multiple disabilities, so they do not fall through gaps between the two Voc Rehab agencies in Nebraska.

We might work with the University of Montana on two research studies about voc rehab services to rural areas. The studies relate to reducing the number of people who leave services before completion, and use of telecommunications to deliver services in rural areas.

We are being audited by Nebraska State Auditor regarding expenditures, revenues, payroll, and fixed assets for the period April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009.

Employment placements occurring this past quarter include:

College Chemistry Instructor
Home Health Care Worker
Tractor Repair/Farm Equipment Repair - Self Employment
Trailer Technician
Envision Store at Offutt Air Force Base
Day Care Worker
Interpreter
Telephone Interviewer
Production Worker

Most of these are full time, 40 hours per week jobs.

CENTER

168 Full-time Clients Served from 1996 to April 2009

97 Competitive Employment; 23 Home Makers

Students: 33

Of the clients that finished training and schooling;

88.8 percent achieved their employment goal

19.6 percent are students from the total number

8.9 percent are not working

Center Activities

Etiquette banquet at SCC

Pizza Luncheon, buffet line

Make over grooming activity

Employment workshop

Lied center activity

Crane activity

Budget hearing, lunch at the Capitol

International day

Commission networking event at the Capitol

Easter egg coloring

Dinner at the apartments for David De Notaris

Braille coin event at the children's museum

ACB State convention

Delta Gamma Ice Cream Social

Theater activity

Deputy Directors and North Platte District

Four clients got jobs this quarter, all full time

March 5 biennium budget hearing

Letters were sent to consumers thanking them for their support during the budget hearing on March 5

Keri Bennett conducted part 2 of her in-service on Traumatic Brain Injury.

Case reviews were completed in Scottsbluff, North Platte, and Kearney.

Deanna attended a conference on services for the aging population in Nevada.

WAGES, we will have 14 participants. The temporary staff will get two weeks training at the center.

LB449 – Teacher Retirement bill passed and signed into law.

Finalized new agreement with Voc Rehab for serving people with multiple handicaps.

We had joint trainings with Lincoln and Norfolk. We scheduled joint trainings within the next two months for Omaha, Grand Island, Kearney, and Scottsbluff.

Omaha District Update

It has been a busy quarter. In February the employment conference was held in Omaha. The response from employers for us to meet with them beyond this event has been great. In our discussions with employers we have addressed that our services are here to help them retain the talent of the existing staff as well as a resource for qualified new employees. We have had several referrals from employers to access the needs of present employees and what we can do to assist them in retaining their employment.

We have had meetings with WEST work from home. At that meeting were also representatives from the Iowa Dept of the Blind and Minnesota Services of the Blind. Jointly we are addressing ways to accommodate this job for individuals to work from home. We at this time have both JAWS and Window Eyes loaded and the programmers are working with technology staff. With this program you can live anywhere and work from home as long as you have DSL.

Likewise we have had similar discussions with ConAgra. With ConAgra you need to live within 60 miles of Omaha. We have Jonathan Ross and our new Program Specialist Larry Oleson meeting with ConAgra on May 4th to go through all the computer screens to be used and see how JAWS is working.

The consumers that attended have felt motivated in their job search. Several have found jobs. One at the Envision Store at Offutt Air Force Base and another is doing day care.

We have had an increase of referrals over the past two months. Most of these referrals have been in the VR track.

We are working hard to prepare for our new case management system; it will be an exciting tool for all of us, but of course take some time to learn.

Group Teaching for Seniors (SAILS) has been so positive, not that they are not all this way, but in particular to see the impact of skills and attitude on these participants.

Group Teach for Teens (TABS) took part in world youth volunteer day on April 25th. Our teens will be working on a literacy project at Westroad's Mall where they will be reading to children. We have the books that are going to be used in Braille and Kelly Coleman has worked hard in coordinating this activity. Kelly has been working with the United Way of the Midlands and each of the students gets a t-shirt for participating. They are all very excited.

Norfolk Staff has been doing their outreach to the Native American Reservations. They have made presentations at the diabetic clinics, senior centers and wellness centers.

We have had several parents from our district write about the positive impact that Winnerfest has had on their teenager. We want to thank Bob Deaton and the Winnerfest Team. You all did a great job!
Hand in Hand group spent time at Henry Doorly Zoo on April 4th.

We have a number of individuals that participated in the NABS conference Beyond Horizons the weekend of April 3-5th.
Larry Oleson completed his training this month and has hit the ground running. It has been a long time since we have had a program specialist for technology. We have been able to accomplish a great deal due to the Omaha team working so hard. It is such an honor to work with all of you. We also want to extend our gratitude to Nancy Coffman and Jan Brandt for all they have done to support us this past 15 months.

Lincoln District

This quarter the Lincoln District has had three sessions of our GATE program. We had two senior citizens, two center candidates and two young men. One of our participants is a father who has not had the confidence to provide care to his children. During the third session, he brought his children and we worked on bathing, feeding and monitoring his children on an activity.

The placement class has reviewed their mock interviews from the employment conference. We have had Serve Nebraska - Americorps present information about opportunities. Verizon Wireless came to conduct mock interviews with eight clients. We are combining the placement class and the vocational seminar in the center starting May 1st. Mitzy and I will co-lead the class. Liz Shotkoski from Gallup is scheduled to come May 16th to do Strength Finders.

Larry Mackey and Larry Roos attended training on Employer Development. Larry Roos was invited to attend Leadership Bootcamp provided by TACE (Regional Technical Assistance and Continuing Education).

We are getting a lot of new referrals, due to Bob Deaton's and Deanna Jesse's efforts. We are contemplating organizing a new referral meeting where we could share our services with a group of individuals.

We had people become employed as an Interpreter, phone interviewer and production worker.

Nebraska Business Enterprise

We have been working with the National Guard for a contract at Ashland for the cafeteria. The contracts still need to be worked out but we have been given e-mail approval of the contract award

We are soliciting vending in the Falls City area for a position for a possible vendor
We recently posted Merlin Volker's facility for transfer and Sandy Alvarado has applied

We are updating the rest areas in Sidney and Ogallala

Business Office

Dave –

No staff changes since last board meeting.

Open enrollment started April 20th and will run through May 15, 2009, with new Wellness plan being introduced.

Beginning a “clean out” of personnel files. Some files have things in them decades old that aren't necessary, so after consulting with Bill Wood from Employee Relations and discussing it with Bill & Pearl, I'll be going through each file, to insure that necessary documentation is retained and the rest shredded.

Kathy –

The staff survey evaluation of the executive director is on-line and ready for staff to complete. The deadline for completion is April 24.

The Legislative Breakfast was held on March 24, 2009 at 8:00 a.m. at the State Capitol. Three other agencies and NCBVI hosted the event. Turnout was very good.

She attended a tour of Outlook Nebraska with Pearl and the commissioners.

The Food Bank Drive has kicked off and is underway. The barrels will be picked up on Friday, April 17.

She attended a Web Master meeting and found the technology information to be very interesting.

The Bar Code scanning will be a time consuming process. She and Don went to the State Capitol and the Executive Building and did some practice scanning which resulted in some questions. Kathy sent an email to Kim Johanns in regards to the questions and is waiting for a reply. A follow-up call will be made to Kim.

Attended the Nebraska.Gov Partner Event which covered the topic of eGovernment.

Attended 2009 State Staff meeting in Lincoln.

Bill:

Conducted eForce Business process Discussions

Worked on prioritizing eForce start up issues

Facilitated the eForce JAWS Teleconferences

Attended numerous ARRA meetings including CSAVR

Assisted with the implementation of eForce

Worked with Attorney General and Materiel in some procedural issues with BEP

Set up Business Units and processed the Awards and Website set up issues for ARRA

Worked with State Auditor's office to facilitate State Audit 2009

Worked on NCBVI payroll process and GL verification Process

Public Comment:

Hubert Paulsen – Hubert asked if NCBVI staff are aware that the Commission Board Meeting Minutes and recording of the meetings are placed on the NCBVI website and that the follow-up to the comments for the staff survey will be stated there.

Van Zandt stated that she will include this information in the memo she plans to write to staff regarding communication and all the ways that people can communicate.

Commissioner Johnson noted that staff is also welcome to contact the commissioners for information about the responses to the staff comments.

Chairman Oltman added that the results of the staff survey will be sent out to all staff. If any staff person has questions regarding the results they are welcome to contact the Commission Board.

Shirley Schmidt – Shirley inquired about NCBVI getting involved when an employee is having problems with their employer. Shirley stated that there are 11 blind individuals who are working for Apogee in Columbus. While they are not having any problems at this time, if they have problems in the future with their employer, can they contact NCBVI about this?

Chairman Oltman stated that consumers can contact the NCBVI Board at any time they wish. Oltman added that the employees at Outlook Nebraska tried to resolve their problems internally before they came to NCBVI. Oltman stated that she is proud that these employees took this initiative because this indicates that they are trying to be independent.

Van Zandt stated that this brings up an issue that is somewhat a challenge as to what extent should NCBVI as a state agency weigh in on certain things. Van Zandt recommended that with a lot of advocacy issues that advocacy agencies for the blind such as ACB and NFB could become involved.

Old Business:

Budget Update:

Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI is doing alright in regards to the budget. The expenditures on case services, which include equipment and training, have gone up. NCBVI has had some carryover money from grants that has helped fund those additional costs and also the reimbursement from Social Security helps support some of the things we are doing. The whole budget is currently fully supported from the additional stimulus funds. In general, staff are doing a great job of investing where we need to while being mindful of costs. Staff is very conscientious about spending money. In general, we are spending money but it is resulting in good outcomes.

Friends of the Commission

Chairman Oltman noted that she forgot to report on this earlier. Oltman stated that she is not aware of any new activity. Van Zandt reported that Friends of the Commission has new officers. The President is currently Christine Boone who is the Director of the Michigan Center for the Blind Training Center. At one time, Christine lived in Nebraska

and worked for NCBVI. Friends will be holding a meeting in May as they are working on revising their bylaws. The main thing that Friends does for NCBVI at this time is to provide a cash fund for clients in case of emergencies that they may need cash for. Van Zandt noted that this has been a huge help for clients.

NIS Update:

There is nothing new to report on NIS this quarter.

NFB-Newsline® Update

Jamie Forbis emailed the NFB-Newsline® Update to the Board members, Pearl Van Zandt and Kathy Stephens. The Report is as follows:

NFB-Newsline®
April 25, 2009

Jamie K. Forbis Nebraska NFB-Newsline® Outreach Coordinator

Greetings Board of Commissioners,

We all know that spring is the beginning of busyness and it's no exception when it comes to NFB-Newsline®! This report is packed full with new information, programs and statistics!

Starting with the coldest month of this report, February. As the temperatures dropped outside and the snow fell subscribers read a whopping 17,939 minutes of content on NFB-Newsline®. 2,284 e-mails were sent during this month and 6 subscribers were added. February 28th was the most popular day for reading in Nebraska with the second of February being the least. February wasn't all that bad especially with the hiring of a new Content Manager, Bob Watson, in Baltimore. Mr. Watson brings with him lots of new ideas and knowledge and we are pleased to have him as a part of the NFB-Newsline® team.

Marching on... Things start to get a little busier. In March subscribers read 12,065 minutes of content. Due to some technical issues in Baltimore the E-mail stats aren't available, but I'm sure the e-mails continued to flow into the inboxes of subscribers. March 7th was a popular news reading day for Nebraskan's with the 17th being not so popular. Nebraska saw an increase of subscribers by 10. This is partly contributed to a demonstration done at the Spring Winner Fest in Aurora. On Friday afternoon of Winner Fest I demonstrated Newsline to small groups of students for four hours. All the students had excellent questions and were eager to learn about Newsline and all its features.

March may have gone out like a lion in most parts of the country, but NFB-Newsline® sure didn't! Two new initiatives were launched at the end of the month; NFB-NEWSLINE® In Your Pocket and Web News on Demand! Both of these initiatives can

be found on the new NFB-Newsline® Online site at: www.nfbnewslineonline.org. NFB-Newsline® In Your Pocket allows subscribers to easily transfer news to their portable devices such as the Victor Reader Stream. Web News On Demand gives subscribers the ability to brows all the content found on NFB-Newsline® through the web. This includes the information under Channel 2, TV listings and over 280 newspapers across the country. Subscribers only need their Newsline codes to access these new initiatives. Please check out www.nfbnewslineonline.org and tell me what you think!

With all the excitement in March, April is feeling a little left out, but it has sure had its share of action. With this report being submitted one week before the Board Meeting it is one week short of statistics, but has still done very well. Five Subscribers joined NFB-Newsline® Nebraska in April and 12,965 minutes have been spent reading content on the phone thus far. The e-mail issue is still being resolved and the ability to track log ins to the new website is still in the process. I'm not able to tell you the most and least popular days of the month yet, but I can say that the middle of the month had a little more activity then the beginning.

As of today NFB-Newsline® Nebraska has 1,332 subscribers, five local papers, and lots of good information under the Nebraska channel. August's report will contain highlights from the Newsline seminars held at the NFB National Convention and hopefully some excellent statistics from the website. In the mean time if you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me. Enjoy the rest of spring and the beginning of summer and happy reading!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

There were no CAP Cases this quarter.

New Business:

State Plan:

Director Van Zandt previously emailed to the commissioners various documents for their review as it relates to the State Plan. The State Plan is made up of a lot of different sections. With regard to submitting the State Plan, State agencies are to submit the State Plan to the Federal partners and Rehab Services Administration. This is to be completed on-line this year. The State Plan will look somewhat different this year, but the content will be similar. Van Zandt indicated that she will forward all the content for the State Plan to the commissioners for their review before it is inserted. The State Plan is due July 1, 2009. Since the Board of Commissioners will not meet again until August 2009, Van Zandt requested the commissioners discuss the information they have received to date. Van Zandt also requested that the commissioners email comments to her as they see necessary.

Chairman Oltman stated that she felt that the information they have received to date is very thorough and informative.

Commissioner Walla moved to approve the State Plan as presented. Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

ARRA – Federal Stimulus Funds

ARRA stands for The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Individuals in Washington, DC worked very hard for Voc. Rehab to be considered part of the recovery stimulus funds. With our main purpose being helping people get jobs and helping employers understand the benefits of hiring a blind person, it really does fit well with economic recovery. The stimulus funds are set up on a two year process. NCBVI has until the end of September 2011 to obligate all of the funds. NCBVI did receive one half of its stimulus fund dollars. For the Voc. Rehab grant, Title 1 of the Rehab Act or Basic Support, we will receive just under \$500,000. The biggest challenge with the stimulus funds is that there are two different messages. Congress and the President's main message to anyone who received funds is "create jobs and maintain jobs." Our federal partners, Rehabilitation Services Administration, actually have a different message to us which is "make short term investments for long term results and don't worry so much about actual jobs." NCBVI needs to do what all parties want; and therefore, we are working to find ways we can create and maintain jobs, and do this in a way that is short term investment for the long term. Therefore, this is our goal. In addition to the Voc Rehab money, NCBVI received Older Blind funds of approximately \$173,000 and Independent Living Part B funds of approximately \$27,000. NCBVI staff has had many discussions on ideas for the use of the stimulus funds.

Van Zandt gave some ideas on what the stimulus funds may be used for. Some of the ideas were equipment and devices for staff and clients, on the job training supports to businesses, full-time status for the Orientation Counselor position in North Platte, public service announcements, developing materials that home teaching clients can work on when their counselor is not present, training vendors, new vendor operations and updates to the new database eForce. Van Zandt reported that NCBVI will be closely tracking the money that we are spending and jobs that are created and maintained. Van Zandt added that the first report is due October 10, 2009. The results of this report will determine whether we get the second half of our stimulus funding.

Commissioner Johnson suggested looking into hiring a grant writer for a period of a year or two to create money for years after the stimulus money is gone. Van Zandt thanked Commissioner Johnson for her suggestion and requested that the commissioners email to her any additional suggestions they may have.

Discussion on Attending Blind Advocacy Group Conventions

Commissioner Oltman stated that the commissioners have had various email discussions about commissioners attending blind advocacy group conventions. It appears to be the consensus that commissioners are in support of commissioners attending these conventions. The logistics of commissioner attendance at these

conventions was discussed. It was decided to have a Task Force consisting of Commissioners Johnson, Jirak and Walla research the issues and come up with a proposal for the commissioners to discuss at the August 2009 Commission Board meeting.

Logistics of August Meeting Timeline, Lodging, etc.

Director Van Zandt reported that she had previously sent an email to the Scottsbluff staff inquiring as to if they thought consumers and the public would attend the meeting if we held part of it Friday night and part Saturday morning. Van Zandt noted that she has not yet heard back for the staff in Scottsbluff on this. At this point we do not know where in Scottsbluff the meeting will be held. The Focus Topic for the meeting will be Supported Employment.

Commissioner Jirak suggested having the meeting at a full service hotel for convenience. This will be looked in to.

Director Van Zandt and Kathy Stephens will check out some logistics for the August meeting and relay these to the commissioners before any final plans are made.

Focus Topics for Next Meetings:

August 8, 2009; Scottsbluff, Topic: Supported Employment
November 21, 2009; Lincoln, Topic: Business Enterprise and Vendors

The Focus Topic for the February, 2010 meeting in Omaha was discussed. Commissioner Johnson suggested having Cheryl Poff talk about the Deaf-Blind Project at the February 2010 meeting. All commissioners agreed to this suggestion.

Other Topic Suggestions for Consideration:
Field Services or How Staff Work with Individuals in the Field

Public Comment:

Bob Deaton – Bob requested that if the commissioners decide to begin the August Commission meeting at 8 a.m., that the Focus Topic remain on the agenda for 9 a.m. or later as he is planning on having some individuals come to Scottsbluff from out of town and they need to allow for some extra travel time.

Chairman Oltman commented that this is a great suggestion.

Bryce Mellen – Bryce commented on the great services that he has received from NCBVI, spoke about the job he currently has in Columbus, and thanked NCBVI and specifically Carlos Servan for all the support they have provided to him.

Final Announcements:

Hubert Paulsen recommended that the commissioners start thinking about where they may want to stop for lunch on the way to Scottsbluff.

Adjourn:

The May 2, 2009 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.
Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens
Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Nancy Oltman
Chairman
NCBVI Board of Commissioners