

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

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2017**



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**NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2017**

INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is the State of Nebraska vocational rehabilitation agency for blind and visually impaired persons. NCBVI is a Core Partner in the Nebraska Workforce Development System, pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Our mission: Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities, and building belief in the blind.

The wide array of programs and services offered by NCBVI make it possible for blind people to become fully participating, contributing members of society. Blind people lead normal lives, work in a wide range of jobs, have families, raise children, and participate in community activities. The following programs and services provide the means for blind persons to achieve their personal vocational or independent living goals:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Transition services
- Nebraska Center for the Blind
- Technology Program
- Nebraska Business Enterprises
- Independent Living/Older Individuals who are Blind Services
- NFB-NEWSLINE®
- Information and Referral Services

Four methods are used for gauging the level of client satisfaction with NCBVI services and gathering information for a needs assessment. Gemini Research and Training (GRT), a private contractor, conducts an online survey to assess the level of consumer satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services four months after case closure and the Nebraska Training Center for the Blind three months after graduation. GRT follow ups with a telephone call to non-respondents or those who cannot fill out the survey via the internet to assist with completion of the form. A Phone survey is also conducted after completion of some of the special programs, such as transition programs and Employment Conferences. Clients served in the independent living track are mailed a customer satisfaction survey six months after case closure. The last form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, held four times a year with the Board of Commissioners, twice a year at State conventions of consumer organizations, and other times as requested.

FINANCIAL REPORT

NCBVI had non-federal match enabling the capture of reallocation funds available last summer, from states unable to meet the full match for federal funds. The past seven years have shown significant reallocation funding of the VR program that NCBVI has been able to draw down to enhance our infrastructure, work with the newest innovations in blindness rehabilitation, and restructure the placement of assets in preparation for implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA.) This information is based on expenditures for SFY 2017. It is noted here that as this report is compiled, SFY 2018 will only show about 10% of the amount of reallocation captured in previous years. Hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico caused much of funds available in 2018 to be diverted from the VR program. That will be better explained next year.

We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds during 2017. The amount in 2017 was more than 2016. SSA Reimbursement is not a particularly dependable source of funding. We currently show this funding in two places, the program it was spent on and the Social Security Reimbursement funds expended.

Expenditures July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017

1. Basic Support	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 4,554,491
B. Aid	\$ 1,082,424
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 351,721
B. Aid	\$ 169,336
3. Supported Employment	
A. Operations	\$ 0
B. Aid	\$ 35,214
4. Independent Living Part B/State IL	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 52,549
B. Aid	\$ 16,424
5. PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha – Enrichment Foundation grant)	
A. Operations	\$ 63
B. Aid	\$ 3,511
6. Senior Blind	\$ 118,553
7. Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)	
A. Operations	\$ 818,223
B. Aid	\$ 186,562

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program prepares blind and visually impaired individuals to enter, retain, or advance in full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market. NCBVI employs 10 vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide training and placement in quality jobs appropriate to each individual's capabilities, abilities, potential, interest, resources, and informed choice. Some of the services provided include, but are not limited to development of more positive attitudes about blindness, alternative skills of blindness training, self-advocacy, elevation of personal expectations, individual and family counseling and guidance, vocational training, job training, job development, job placement, and assistive technology services.

During the federal fiscal year, 505 clients received active VR services; of these, 46 achieved competitive employment. Clients served by NCBVI very often have significant secondary disabilities. During the federal fiscal year, VR services were provided to 207 blind and visually impaired individuals with multiple disabilities. For example, blind and visually impaired veterans returning from active duty often have brain/head injuries as well. In addition, more people are surviving serious accidents with traumatic brain injuries than had been the case in the past. Regardless of the secondary disabilities involved, NCBVI counselors work with clients to build self-confidence and high expectations, to gain the skills of blindness, and to achieve their personal vocational goals.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services include career exploration, interest testing, and vocational planning. Assistance with tuition, books, technology, and readers are available to those pursuing vocational training. When an individual is ready for employment, job readiness, job placement, and follow-up services are provided.

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

Each of the three districts operated by NCBVI conduct workshops to prepare job-ready clients for a systematic search for employment, job interviews, social skills, resume writing, networking, problem-solving, and self-assertiveness. NCBVI counselors also reach out to educate businesses and public entities about the capabilities of blind workers and promote high-quality employment options for qualified blind job seekers.

This year, NCBVI clients obtained the following jobs: administrative service manager, Nebraska Business Enterprise vendors, cashier, childcare worker, food preparation and service worker, computer system analyst, cost estimator, customer service representatives, dishwasher, post-secondary teacher, guidance counselor, executive secretary, food preparation worker, fast food worker, hair dresser, historian, home health aide, hotel desk clerk, industrial-organizational psychologists, insurance sales agent, life skills assistant, machine operator, mental health counselors, network system computer administrator, farm animal caretaker, nursing assistant,

radio announcer, Randolph Shephard facility clerk, receptionists, rehabilitation counselor, special education teacher, statistical assistant, stock clerk, switchboard operator, and tax preparer.

NCBVI is committed to helping clients achieve high quality competitive employment outcomes, not just the first available job, but full-time jobs with good wages and benefits including health insurance and opportunities for advancement. Many of the clients who achieve employment as a result of NCBVI services no longer need social security benefits or welfare.

TRANSITION SERVICES

Throughout our history, NCBVI has long recognized the need for transition services as early as possible in a young person's life. Meaningful work experiences, exposure to successful adult role models, and training in independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up.

Increased similar recognition of the need for specific services to youth with disabilities has now been established at the federal level, beginning in 2014 with the passage of WIOA, the most current revision of the Rehabilitation Act. WIOA places greater emphasis on Pre-Employment Transition Services, (Pre-ETS), promoting a smoother transition from school to work. Since its passage, NCBVI has embraced the challenge of the more intense focus to assist blind and visually impaired students aged 14-21 through job exploration, work readiness skills, college and post-secondary exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and self-advocacy skill development.

In September 2015, NCBVI hired a Transition Specialist to provide services statewide and strengthen the relationships with schools, families, and local employers on behalf of blind and visually impaired children and youth. In keeping with our mission and guided by the Pre-ETS requirements listed in WIOA, over this past year NCBVI conceived, planned and executed a number of programs and initiatives which are designed to increase and sustain greater independence and confidence for the youth we serve through the transition phase of their lives. Detailed below are summations of much of our work in the area of Transition Services for NCBVI this year.

Winnerfest is a 2-day retreat for blind and visually impaired students aged 14 through 18 held twice each academic year at a central location within the state. The program is designed to not only present employment and/or college preparation skills, but also, to connect students with a peer mentoring network of other blind or visually impaired students to share ideas and techniques for success and to eliminate the isolation many low vision youth experience in their home school communities.

This year, the Spring Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI, and the International School of Protocol, A Baltimore based training organization dedicated to bettering the lives of everyone from top business executives to underprivileged inner-city youth through the empowerment of the possession of information and greater social and emotional skills. It was entitled: "Blind & Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Harnessing the Power of Emotional Intelligence for Self-advocacy and College Success". Nineteen (19) youth were empowered to reach for higher achievement in their future endeavors in both the worlds of work and college. While this program covered standard fare such as how to work a room and public speaking, this curriculum had the students dig deeper within themselves and encouraged them to try to develop and utilize their own personal emotional intelligence. Students worked on everything from verbal and non-verbal communication to concepts such as time management, relationship building, and how to utilize technology properly, essential skills for success in vocational training and employment. A

particular highlight was the college recruiter fair reception. The students prepared one-minute speeches to utilize in meeting the recruiters and they not only visited booths but also, navigated a reception style situation learning how to travel the room with food, drink and a long white cane. There was also an emotional intelligence sessions specific to blindness skills development. Winnerfest concluded with a dining simulation of a more formal business or social situation dinner, allowing the students to utilize their newly acquired food etiquette skills.

The fall Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI and We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind. For this workshop, We Fit Wellness, designed a curriculum that focused on work readiness skills and self-advocacy skills enhancement, incorporating all of the five WIOA Pre-ETS requirements listed above. The program was entitled: "Exploring Employment". During this program, 15 youth were empowered to leverage their own unique talents and abilities to become better leaders and team players and be able to more effectively anticipate the future and prepare for all aspects of employment from the interview through day-to-day work. They were exposed to a wide range of activities, some unique to blindness and others more universal in nature. These included: networking with peers, how to dress to impress, the art of social dancing, how to hunt for jobs with technology designed for the blind like NFB-NEWSLINE®, the ins and outs of entrepreneurship and how you could be your own boss, self-advocacy on the job role plays, explored what the job scape of the future for the blind might look like, conducted a volunteer work experience at a local nursing home facility, engaged in challenging games to build leadership and team building skills, participated in mock interviews which were recorded for future work back in the field with their counselors and watched a movie entitled "Do You Dream in Color?" which is a film about four blind teens coming to age and their challenges to complete school or achieve their goals. Students also engaged in table topic conversations during meals which demonstrated their growing skills in leadership and self-advocacy.

This year we held the College Workshop, an annual event designed to introduce blind or visually impaired college students to alternative methods and additional resources they can use for success in the academic world despite their vision loss. Often in the past and once again this year, the workshop was jointly conducted with the Nebraska Association of Blind Students (NABS), a consumer group made up of blind college students who can serve as role models and share their success with our clients. Seventeen (17) Pre-ETS students about to make the transition to college and adult students already in school attended this event. Our keynote speaker was Henry (Hoby) Wedler PH D., a blind chemist who owns his own consulting company. He spoke to everyone about the importance of being assertive, following their dreams, taking risks, and not excepting limits that others place upon them. He empowered everyone with discussions about how they can do Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) or other classes that are traditionally not thought to be accessible to blind persons. He even led each student through several hands on science demonstrations to underscore the point.

Other highlights from this seminar included presentations by NCBVI technology staff, a memory techniques and study skills seminar by Dale Carnegie, presentations by WINAHEAD and Education Qwest, 1 touch self-defense demonstrations which come from a specific set of techniques for the blind, discussions by blind college students and parents, blind persons talking about how to get

involved in extracurricular activities, philosophical discussions on how to handle real-life situations as a blind student, and a dorm style cooking skills activity.

This past summer, WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a six week work based learning program held in Lincoln annually for more than twenty years, provided work, blindness skill enhancement and life experiences for the sixteen (16) blind and visually impaired students ages 15 to 21 who completed the program. Participants engaged in a wide array of preparatory experiences, they lived on UNL city campus, utilized public transportation and engaged in many recreational activities beyond their jobs.

This summer, for the second year in a row, WAGES was kicked off with an opening weekend seminar presented by the folks from the International School of Protocol noted above, entitled: "Blind and Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Strategies for Managing Relationships on and off the Job for Personal and Professional Success". This curriculum focused on workplace skills and how to be socially savvy in the work environment. The students conducted many hands on activities, capping off the program with a graduation ceremony where they presented awards to one another in a banquet type setting.

WAGES students work fulltime jobs ranging between 30 and 40 hours per week. A wide range of employers in the Lincoln area step up each summer to assist our students with their growth and expanding capabilities including: St. Elizabeth's Heart Hospital; Capitol Humane Society; Antonio's Tastes of Lincoln; State Capitol Tours; Southeast High School custodial department; Latino American Commission; Aging Partners; Selleck Dining Services; Lancaster County Records Department and Information Management; Clyde Malone Community Center; Public Works and Utilities; Holiday Inn Lincoln Southwest; Downtown YMCA; Canine Design; and Lincoln Children's Zoo.

Again this year, WAGES included an out of state trip to a blindness consumer convention to expose participants to adult blind role models and empower them through the stretching of their thoughts about what they can accomplish in their lives. The trip afforded the students the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills into practice and to learn advocacy and networking skills. Many NCBVI and contracted staff chaperoned the WAGES participants and their families on this trip. It was by all accounts a very successful endeavor. Whether it was flying and leaving Nebraska for the first time or navigating a hotel independently with a long white cane, everyone grew through one experience or another. The growth in the students was tremendous and they emerged as a group who sees their blindness as a part of them not a barrier to who they will become.

One exciting new venture, tangentially related to WAGES, was the arrangement of three additional work based learning opportunities through a partnership with the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), for students who had significant secondary disabilities that made it difficult for them to participate fully in in WAGES. NCBVI and NCECBVI jointly developed job sites and worked together to recruit and train support personnel such as job readiness trainers, and NCBVI paid the salaries of the supporting staff and the on-the-job opportunities for the individuals. The jobs were in the hometowns of the students

and the hours were more suited to their abilities. This program was a huge success for both partnership development and, more important, for the students themselves. It is hoped that these students will attend the full program in subsequent summers. Both NCBVI and NCECBVI plan to expand this program this next year to those or other additional students.

Each summer, NCBVI hosts a four-day blindness skill immersion and recreational opportunities based summer camp entitled "Project Independence". This summer, ten youth between 8 and 13 attended. The theme was "I Put the PI in Pioneer: Exploring My Future Frontier". This theme was selected in observation of Nebraska's 150th birthday and to highlight the parallel between the journey that life will take them on and how they need to be ready and the preparation early settlers made on their journey to making our state a success. Campers participated in a competition for completing typical daily tasks with blindness alternative techniques entitled: home chore challenge. Other activities included audio archery and fishing, building their own 1867 era toys, planted plants they could take home, going on a hayrack ride and cookout, running their own birthday party planning service and giving Nebraska a birthday party, taking a field trip into Lincoln to learn about Nebraska's history, and much more.

NCBVI also offers many individualized and group transition services on an on-going basis at the local or district level through a variety of field based and group teaching opportunities. The Omaha District holds three monthly groups they entitled Teen Adventures in Blindness Skills (TABS), and Junior TABS for elementary aged students, and a brand new biweekly group Transition Skills Group (TSG). TSG focuses mainly on job exploration, work readiness and self-advocacy skills. Students build data sheets, resumes, talk about grooming and soft skills etc. Many of these same youth attend the TABS group to focus more on blindness skill acquisition such as cooking, braille, cane travel etc. Jr. TABS teaches these same blindness skills to elementary aged students with the occasional field based activity, such as, bowling under sleep shades, solving problems at an escape room and attending descriptive movies or plays, etc. On a quarterly basis, parents also attend a parallel session to discuss issues and build a peer network that they can leverage for advice on IEP rites, best practices for their students, etc. Recently, this parent group added a conference line making it possible for parents to participate statewide.

The Lincoln District also brings in students K-12 from across the district monthly on a Saturday for a similar group they call (STARS), which stands for Social, Techniques, Advocacy, and Recreation for Students. These meetings are a combination of items mentioned above with activities involving both blindness skills, job readiness skills and field based activities to practice their newly acquired techniques.

This year, NCBVI formed an internal transition committee with the goal of bringing consistency and collaboration to our transition efforts statewide. Thus far, efforts have concentrated on defining the role of the committee and to focus on how to improve relations with other partners and teachers, how to bring better consistency to our service delivery statewide, and how to create resources for our current and future staff to help raise the capacity of all staff in the area of transition. The committee consists of staff from all three districts who perform Pre-ETS duties, a supervisor and the transition specialist which aids in consistency statewide in transition service delivery.

During this past year, NCBVI has made efforts to strengthen our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired and other education providers. WE continue to make direct visits, introduce ourselves, and remind education personnel that we are the lead agency for youth in Nebraska who are experiencing blindness and visual impairment. Vocational Rehabilitation staff also continues to make visits to local school districts to identify blind and visually impaired youth in need of services.

NCBVI continues to collaborate with NCECBVI, a statewide program and facility for blind school-aged youth based out of ESU4. NCBVI presented at a parent workshop in September designed to help students and their parents understand what they need to have in place to enroll and succeed in college, we also participated as a stakeholder in their annual meeting and NCBVI staff has met with their administrative team to develop joint programming opportunities and establish collaborative agreements.

In addition, NCBVI transition staff helped plan and present at the Eastern Nebraska Transition Conference. NCBVI also continues to present at courses of special education teacher preparation at UNL conducted by the director of the teachers of the visually impaired endorsement program and other faculty. As a result, the Transition Specialist was invited and attended a meeting of a new advisory committee at UNL. This committee is formed as part of a grant given to both the teachers of deaf and blind preparation programs by the OSEP office entitled the Mid-Plains Professional Upgrade Partnership – Sensory Disabilities, designed to recruit and train educators. This Advisory Board will meet annually until the project’s completion in 2021 to review progress, evaluate program data, and provide suggestions.

Earlier this year, NCBVI participated in a Capacity Building forum focus on transition services for youth in transition in Kansas City. This forum was Nation Wide in scope and was designed to bring the core partners in transition together at one table to create a plan for how to move transition forward in our case within Nebraska. This was a significant development for NCBVI because, while this forum has existed for more than 10 years now, NCBVI had never been invited. Nebraska VR was previously thought to be the only partner of record needed to include adult rehabilitation. Raising our visibility has been and continues to be one of the priorities in the upcoming months and years and each step forward is not small. It is our belief that these relationships and our programs have led to much growth in professional collaboration.

In conclusion, NCBVI continues to expand opportunities and programs for both our staff and students alike. We have and will continue to put the resources given to us to the most efficient use to help young Nebraskans transition into successful lives and careers as contributing members of society. We will keep working and innovating until they too can take part in the “Good Life” we know this state has to offer.

NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the blind is a comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training facility for blind adults living in Nebraska. It provides an estimated fifteen thousand hours of training each year as a component of the federally mandated services provided by NCBVI. Similar to other NCBVI services and programs, The Nebraska Center for the Blind receives the majority of its funding through the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Grant.

The Nebraska Center for the Blind utilizes the "Structured Discovery" approach to training students in the alternative skills of blindness, the leading cognitive based training methodology in the field of blindness rehabilitation. Center students are provided training in five primary areas of instruction: Orientation and Mobility, Braille, Communication/Technology, Home Management, and Wood Shop. These primary areas of instruction are designed to build a base of practical daily living skills, highly effective observation and problem solving skills, an enhanced understanding of their vocational potential, confidence, and a positive sense of self-esteem.

Potential Center students are provided initial training in the alternative skills of blindness by NCBVI field staff in their home environment. To be eligible for Center Training, an individual must meet the eligibility requirements for NCBVI services and be able to participate in a full-time comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training program. Consumers considering participating in Center Training complete a tour of the Center. After that, if they are still interested, a Three-Day Stay experience is arranged to help them decide if Center training is the way they want to go.

During the Three-Day Stay, consumers are mentored by senior Center students and receive training under sleep shades to give them a more realistic idea of what Center Training is all about. Consumers choosing to attend The Center are aware that training involves eight hours a day, five days per week, and lasts an average of six to nine months. There were 18 Three-Day Stays this fiscal year. Sixty-seven percent of consumers that participated in a Three-Day Stay returned for the full Center Training program. This percentage would be higher, but the Center was remodeled which made the facility unavailable for training for a few months out of the year. There are also three consumers who want to attend, but need to have their health issues stabilized before that is a possibility

In keeping with the principles of Structured Discovery, Center students are encouraged to solve problems independently during training with minimal assistance from others. This approach introduces the student to a series of experiences, ranging from the simple to the complex. This requires the processing of information and how it relates to their blindness. Students with some vision, wear sleep shades (blindfolds) to focus on the development of non-visual techniques. This eliminates the natural tendency to rely on inadequate or unsafe vision, thereby building confidence in non-visual techniques. Once the students have learned to rely truly on alternative skills, they are better able to make informed choices and decisions regarding when to use visual versus non-visual skills.

Each week, students receive eight hours of instruction in each of the five primary skill areas: Orientation and Mobility (using a long white cane), Home Management, Wood Shop, Braille, and

Communication/Technology. Two hours is set aside during each week for a blindness-related seminar facilitated by one of the students and focused on issues related to blindness. Another two hours is set aside for a vocational seminar that is led by the Department of Labor (Workforce Development). Center students also meet with the Client Services Counselor, when necessary, regarding more personal issues, goals, and objectives through counseling and guidance.

A primary objective of Center Training is the development of a positive overall understanding and adjustment to blindness. Participation in blindness-related group seminars focuses on challenging deeply held attitudes and beliefs regarding blindness, and the capabilities of blind people. With competence in the alternative skills of blindness, come an improved sense of self-confidence and a greater sense of self-efficacy as blind people. Graduates of Center Training are prepared to pursue personal, educational, vocational, and independent living goals to achieve a competitive place in society.

Real world experiences during activities or classroom instruction help consumers gain firsthand experience interacting with the sighted public. This provides consumers with the opportunity to develop the insights and confidence necessary to respond effectively to prevailing societal attitudes, discrimination, and low expectations. Center students participate in a wide range of activities, either in the Center itself or with the community. This encourages greater independence and access to the world around them using the skills of blindness. Activities have included attendance at Legislative meetings, public hearings, banquets, state and national consumer conventions, engaging in traditional holiday events, community service projects, and other volunteer efforts. Up to four activities can be scheduled each month. A total of 30 activities were held during this fiscal year.

In addition, the Center Apartment Resource Technician coordinates as many as two activities per month in the evenings and on weekends. These activities are optional and do not require the use of sleep shades. It is during weekend and evening hours that consumers learn how best to use their remaining vision, and to appropriately incorporate non-visual skills when visual methods prove unreliable.

Center students live independently in furnished, efficiency residential apartments located in downtown Lincoln. NCBVI support of Center students, in accordance with Federal regulations, includes the cost of training/fees, training materials, rent, utilities, local telephone service, transportation expenses, and grocery and activity costs. Center students are responsible for personal expenses, such as personal entertainment, cable television, individual internet service in the apartment, cab fares to and from medical appointments or those related to personal shopping. Center students commute daily between the apartments and the Center by city bus.

Over the last five years, the Nebraska Center for the Blind has averaged 14.6 students per annum. New staff members go through Center Training for a period of 600 hours, eight hours per day, and five days a week, to earn their Certification in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling for the Blind (CVRCB). If the employee has functional vision, then sleep shades will be worn during this training. This approach to new staff training promotes a deeper understanding of blindness and a stronger belief in the alternative skills of blindness enabling blind people to compete on terms of equality

with their normally sighted peers, and achieve greater personal independence. During this fiscal year, the Center provided training to two new staff members.

The Nebraska Center for the Blind engages in an ongoing program of public education to promote the integration of blind persons into jobs, home, and community. The Center invites individuals and groups to tour the facility; this promotes a greater awareness of the capabilities of blind people. There were 41 tours this fiscal year. The Center continues to assist Nebraska Business Enterprise staff in evaluating prospective candidates interested in a career in self-employment.

Special efforts were made this year to expand opportunities and programs for both staff members and students alike. We have and will continue to put the resources given to us to the most efficient use to help young Nebraskans transition into successful lives and careers as contributing members of society. We will keep working and innovating until they too can take part in the "Good Life" we know this state has to offer.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

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

The Technology Program provides training to NCBVI counselors and personnel in the basic operation of access technology for the blind enabling them to work with clients and complete job responsibilities more effectively.

The Technology Program Manager works on accessibility projects at NCBVI. Accessibility ensures that staff members who are blind can efficiently use web sites, software, and equipment necessary to complete their jobs. The Technology Program Manager has assisted the State of Nebraska with accessibility testing and remediation strategies for the Secretary of State sample ballots and voter registration portal, Payroll and Financial Center, Employee Work Center, and the Employee Development Center. NCBVI does not have the capacity or the responsibility to be the primary source of accessibility testing and remediation for the State of Nebraska, but does provide consultation to those projects directly touching the work of staff members and the lives of clients. NCBVI is currently working with the Department of Administrative Services to ensure the accessibility of the FuzioN system. All state agencies are urged to incorporate accessibility into their products at the time of procurement or development. Incorporating accessibility features into a system at the beginning of the product lifecycle ensures the applications are usable by all, and is less costly and time-consuming than retrofitting applications that are already in use.

Last year, NCBVI launched a new web site. It is hosted on the Nebraska Meadowlark platform that allows easy updating of site contents and a more responsive design. This allows for visitors with various devices and screen sizes to make the most of the content presented. Meadowlark is also accessible to blind and visually impaired viewers and has received positive reviews from NCBVI staff and consumers.

Last year, NCBVI's Federal grantors came out with new regulations subsequent to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Two pertinent pieces of WIOA to the technology program are, its emphasis on pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), and the significant changes to the data that needs to be included in required federal reports.

The WIOA regulations change precipitated major modifications in the federal reporting frequency and structure. Towards the end of 2016, NCBVI signed a contract with Alliance Enterprises for the AWARE platform to comply with federal reporting requirements. The AWARE platform is used by

35 Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. The software's developers created new interfaces and reports to reflect the needed data collection and reporting required by the new law. The AWARE system is also accessible with screen access software and devices that NCBVI's staff is currently using. In fact, AWARE is an acronym meaning Accessible Web Activity Reporting Environment. Because Alliance Enterprises, the developer of the system, partners with the major screen access software manufacturers and Microsoft, it will be easier to ensure that the software stays accessible as new changes are rolled out. AWARE went live on July 1, 2017.

Technology Specialists work with employers and clients to ensure that they have the resources necessary to meet the client's vocational goal, and to work with the systems used by the business. This past year, consultations were provided to the Office of the CIO, Department of Administrative Services State Personnel, Department of Administrative Services - Materiel Division, Accent Division of West Corporation, America's Job Center (AJC)-Beatrice, AJC-Lincoln, Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP)-Lincoln, ATP-Omaha, ATP-Scottsbluff, Boss Vending, Cabela's-Kearney, Central Community College-Grand Island, Central Community College-Hasting, Cody Elementary School-North Platte, Cozad High School, Dunkin' Donuts-Kearney, Embassy Suites-Lincoln, Friend Freightways, Inc., Gibbons Public Schools, Grand Island Public Schools, Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board, Habitat for Humanity, Hemingford Public Schools, Holiday Inn-Lincoln, Kearney Chamber of Commerce, Kearney High School, Lincoln Behavioral Health Research Center, Lincoln Public Schools, Loup County Public School-Taylor, McCook Junior High School, Mexican American Commission, Midwest Eye Professionals, Nebraska Department of Labor-Lincoln, Nebraska Department of Labor-Omaha, Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children-Omaha, New Tribes Mission and New Beginnings Counseling, North Star-Columbus, Northwest Community College-Norfolk, Omaha Public Library, PayPal, Prairie View Elementary School-Ogallala, Samson Automotive, Southwest Junior/Senior High School-Hartley, St. Cecilia Catholic High School-Hastings, St. Patrick's Catholic School-Elkhorn, Titan Medical Group, United States Department of Agriculture-Lincoln, United States Post Office-Grand Island, University of Nebraska-Kearney, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Visiting Nurse Association, Western Community College-Scottsbluff, and Wood River Elementary School

Technology Specialists utilize adaptive software for consumers' on-the-job settings. Most of the time, only small changes are required to make the blind person's job feasible and more competitive. However, in some instances it takes a lot of effort, research, and resources to solve a problem. When Technology Specialists meet with clients who may be in a job-jeopardy situation, job duties are analyzed and intensive on-the-job training is provided to keep that person employed. If a person is working toward employment, the technology specialist evaluates what skills will be necessary for the educational and employment activities to reach employment. Keyboarding and Braille assessments are given, depending on the type of technology needed. On occasion, NCBVI contracts with third parties to provide scripting to make applications more accessible and to teach the use of access technology.

The Technology Program Manager and Technology Specialists engage in public relations activities to educate business people, consumers, and the general public about the capabilities of blind and visually impaired individuals who use access technology. Technology Specialists also hold

memberships in the Association of Information Technology Professionals and the National Federation of the Blind Assistive Technology Trainers Division.

Technology Specialists teach college-bound clients how to access textbook materials from Learning Ally, Bookshare, various publisher content portals and sites, and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Public school systems will too often provide textbooks to blind and visually impaired students instead of teaching them how to access the materials themselves. Teaching younger students to get excited about technology also means teaching them how to do things their sighted peers are doing, such as sending text messages and using mainstream technologies including the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Some phones contain capabilities, or can be outfitted with software that verbalizes the information on the screen or allows the user to read phone output on a device called a Refreshable Braille Display. Several blind and visually impaired students are using iPads in the classroom to take notes, read accessible books and use other applications, and for accessing information from smart boards used by the teacher. iOS, Apple's mobile operating system, is a good example of mainstream accessibility where the manufacturer builds in features that make devices useable by blind people out of the box.

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

Technology is advancing at a rapid pace. More and more mainstream software and hardware developers are incorporating accessibility features into their product designs. For example, Apple provides a screen reading package called VoiceOver in all of their products. It allows blind people to read what is on the screen of their Apple device with spoken output or in Braille using a refreshable Braille display device. Google provides accessibility through the TalkBack screen reader on its Android Platform. Many NCBVI staff members use iPhones in their daily work, and each office has demonstration iPad and iPad mini units. Many staff members are also using iPads and can demonstrate these to our clients. NCBVI also has a relationship with a local access technology dealer, NanoPac, who can facilitate demonstrations of access technology products in NCBVI offices or other settings.

INDEPENDENT LIVING/OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND PROGRAM (IL/OIB)

Independent living services are provided to blind and visually impaired individuals with independent living rather than vocational goals. The IL Program serves clients under the age of 55; the OIB Program serves clients age 55 years of age and older. IL/OIB clients receive training and services promoting greater independence in the home and full participation in community life.

During federal fiscal year 2017, 529 IL/OIB clients received active independent living services. 513 clients were 55 years of age or over; 16 were under 55 years of age. Five were under 19 years of age.

Blind and visually impaired clients receive training in the alternative skills needed to pursue vocational and independent living goals. Instruction typically begins in the home, focusing on areas of cane travel, Braille, and home management. Those needing more intensive instruction often move on to training in the Center.

Seven Orientation Counselors and a Program Specialist serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved populations, especially those in rural areas. These teachers provide guidance and counseling services and training promoting positive attitudes about blindness, and encourage consumers to regain active and productive lives. Instruction may include training in the skills of blindness such as Braille, travel using a white cane, and activities of daily living (cooking, shopping, housekeeping, money identification, telling time, recordkeeping, managing mail, payment of bills, and so on.

NCBVI offers group independent living skills training for blind and visually impaired seniors: Senior Adventures in Independent Living (SAIL) in the Omaha district, Group Alternative Techniques Experiences (GATE) in the Lincoln district, and For Your Independence (FYI) in the North Platte district. The Omaha and Lincoln districts also provide group teaching to blind and visually impaired teenagers. These programs give participants the opportunity to build confidence in the alternative skills of blindness in a setting away from home. Training during this and other group teaching programs is conducted using sleep shades. Sessions include cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities promote use of community resources to effectively conduct the activities of daily living.

Orientation Counselors provide instruction in the use of NFB-NEWSLINE®, a digital voice newspaper service accessed by phone and internet; Talking Book and Braille Services, a library service for the blind offering Braille and audio books and magazines; Radio Talking Book, a voice newspaper and reading service accessed by radio, television, and the internet; and use of the Internet and email. Instruction is also provided in the use of assistive technology devices and various aids including Braille writing equipment, talking calculators, talking glucometers, Closed Circuit TVs (for reading regular or large print), magnifiers, Braille or talking watches, and so on. NCBVI staff members work closely with the Area Agencies on Aging, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Independent Living, eye care professionals, and other service agencies.

In December 2017, The Enrichment Foundation awarded NCBVI a \$10,000 grant in support of PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha), for blind and visually impaired adults living in Douglas and Sarpy Counties in need of access technology and services to maintain independence in the home. A renewal of the grant will start in January 2018 with \$10,000.

Appropriations from the Unicameral of Annual state funds in the amount of \$40,000 for the biennium 2018-2019 will replace the loss of these funds as the Federal Government under WIOA allocated that fund to the Department of Health and Human Services. NCBVI continues to serve blind and visually impaired Nebraskans of all ages.

NEBRASKA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

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

In accordance with the Randolph-Sheppard Act, vendors (now called licensees) make monthly payments of "Set Aside" to the agency. This has covered a portion of the new equipment provided, repairs, retirement and support needed to keep the licensees fully and efficiently operating.

There are eighteen licensed vendors and two in training currently running vending facilities. NBE licensees manage over 100 sites and run three cafeterias; this includes the dining facility at the Army National Guard in Ashland and the Cafeterias in the Dept. of Transportation and the Nebraska State office building. This year, we added five Nebraska Corrections locations; creating new jobs and working on 5 more. NBE maintains more than 300 machines in federal, state and local buildings, including all 20 rest areas on Interstate 80 across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on many new vending opportunities with the Department of Agriculture, Department of Corrections, Immigration, The Census bureau and other locations across the state. We are building the program and creating more jobs for blind people.

In 2017, there were 88 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending or food service in Nebraska managed by NBE. Some of the locations of the NBE vending facilities are as follows:

Nebraska Department of Corrections headquarters, South Folsom, Lincoln
Nebraska State Penitentiary
Citizenship Information Service, Highlands, Lincoln
Nebraska Department of Transportation headquarters, five break rooms, Lincoln
Main Post Office, Omaha, 1124 Pacific, seven break rooms
Seven Post office annexes in Omaha
U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization service, 1717 Avenue H, Omaha
FBI, S. 120th St, Omaha
Five break rooms, Zorinski Federal Building, 1616 Capital Ave, Omaha
Federal Court House, 18th and Dodge, Omaha
Parks Service Headquarters, 700 Riverfront Drive, Omaha
City County Building, 19th Street, Omaha
Vocational Rehabilitation. 120th and Q, Omaha
County Courthouse, 18th and Farnam, Omaha
700 'R' Street, Lincoln, Main Post Office, Lincoln
Nebraska Citizenship Information Service, 850 'S' Street, Lincoln
Veterans Administration, 3800 Old Cheney, Lincoln
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln

Homeland Security, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE
 Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
 Taste of Lincoln Café in the State Office Building at 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
 Denney Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
 State Office Building at 1526 K Street, Lincoln
 Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island
 Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
 Nebraska State Patrol Training Academy, Grand Island
 Craft State Office Building, North Platte
 All 20 rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Sidney on Interstate 80
 UPS Distribution Center, Hwy 385, Sidney
 Progress Rail Repair Center, Sidney
 Main Post Office, 2510 S. 11th, Kearney
 Wilson's Truck Repair, Hwy 30, Grand Island
 DuVal Diesel Service, Shady Bend Road, Grand Island
 Camp Ashland Military Dining Facility, Hwy 6, Ashland
 Hastings Main Post Office, 300 N. Kansas Street
 Fremont Main Post Office, 348 E. 6th Street
 Norfolk Main Post Office, N. 4th Street
 Four Lincoln Post Office annexes
 Joint Forces Headquarters, National Guard Lincoln, vending
 Nebraska State Historical Society Museum, two locations

The program continues to grow, and blind entrepreneurs are earning increasing annual incomes as more vending sites are developed across the state. This year, new routes were added in Lincoln and Omaha, creating jobs.

We are currently beginning training for four possible new licensees in the coming year.

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

Business skills are developed through online courses relating to areas such as human relations, supervision, business practices, basic accounting, taxes, marketing costs, and inventory control.

The NBE Licensee's Committee met in March, May, September, and December. The NBE staff or a current licensee provided training sessions, for the other licensees, at each of the quarterly meetings in 2017.

NBE STATISTICS

Gross Sales	Set Aside
\$1,513,225.85	\$27,401.48

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska eighteen years ago with the help of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN), and continues to grow. This program is an audio information system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers, and a variety of other publications and magazines. Currently, there are 485 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 367 state newspapers; 6 Nebraska-based newspapers, 13 national papers, 17 international papers, 5 Spanish publications, 21 breaking news publications, and 67 magazines; all accessible by touch-tone telephone, computer, or through Apple devices. Also available are weekly store circulars, TV listings, and job listings. The system enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-Newsline® when traveling throughout the United States.

Using the buttons on the telephone, the listener chooses first a paper or a magazine, then the category within the paper, such as national, state, or local news, sports, area events and editorial opinions. The listener immediately hears the first story of that category. They can then skip to the next story or column, replay it, jump ahead or go back in ten second increments, adjust the volume, choose a different voice, or exit the category and choose another by pressing a single digit. Listener options also include the ability to slow down or speed up the rate of speech, a special time check key and a pause control that allows the listener to stop reading a story for a period of two minutes without losing his/her place in the story, the availability to spell a word, go forward or backward by paragraphs, go forward or backward by sentences, and/or to search for a subject throughout the paper by a chosen word. Articles can even be emailed to subscribers with a single key stroke.

The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 2,041 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is available to qualified readers free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in all 93 counties. Emailing and the internet are the most popular forms of communication today. NFB-Newsline® recognizes this and is constantly developing new ways to keep up to date with this fast paced world. NFB-Newsline® online was created for subscribers to browse through papers and have more access to current events without having to be connected to a telephone.

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

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

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

NCBVI personnel routinely provide information and referrals to agencies and organizations serving blind and visually impaired consumers. Assistance with the application process or instruction in the use of equipment issued by these agencies and organizations is also available if needed. Some of the more frequently referred to agencies and organizations are listed below:

Nebraska Talking Book and Braille Services (TBBS): the State Library Service for the Blind and Reading Impaired. NCBVI counselors frequently assist new users of TBBS services in the use of recorded materials on cartridges.

Radio Talking Book Services Network: a statewide, closed circuit radio reading service for those individuals who have disabilities, visual or physical, preventing them from reading printed material. Special receivers or televisions with the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) feature are required to hear the broadcasts of RTBN; it is also now available via the internet. Although there are books available for the visually impaired, there is still a daily informational void that blind people experience. RTBN makes it possible for blind people to stay in touch with their local community and what is going on around them.

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

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

Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation: a low vision clinic located in Omaha. NCBVI may provide financial assistance for low vision aids or devices promoting greater independence in the home or on the job if recommended subsequent to a low vision evaluation.

There are many other entities, public and private, across Nebraska which can benefit persons with visual impairments. NCBVI staff network and partner with a wide range of organizations to assure that resources are maximized for blind Nebraskans. As a Core Partner of WIOA, NCBVI is closely linked to the workforce development system that helps all job-seekers accomplish their employment goals.