

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

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2018**



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NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2018

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 Services
- Nebraska Business Enterprises
- Independent Living/Older Individuals who are Blind Program
- NFB-NEWSLINE®
- Information and Referral Services

Four methods are used for gauging the level of consumer 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 throughout vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, four months after VR case closure, and three months after graduation from the Nebraska Center for the Blind. GRT follows up with a telephone call to non-respondents or those who cannot fill out the survey via the internet to assist with completion of the survey. Consumers served in the independent living (IL) track are given a customer satisfaction survey via the phone six months after case closure by GRT. 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 reallotment funds available last summer, from states unable to meet the full match for federal funds. In seven of the past eight years NCBVI has received significant reallotment funding of VR services that NCBVI has been able to use 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.) In SFY 2018, we only received 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 VR services. This will improve somewhat in 2019, but will likely never reach the level of funding we were accustomed to.

Social Security Reimbursement funds were down in 2018 from 2017. SSA Reimbursement is not a particularly dependable source of funding. Below we show this funding in two places, the services or program it was spent on and the Social Security Reimbursement funds received.

Expenditures July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018

1. Basic Support	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 3,987,569
b. Aid	\$ 960,119
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 283,792
b. Aid	\$ 26,494
3. Supported Employment	
a. Operations	\$ 400
b. Aid	\$ 21,683
4. Independent Living State IL	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 11,023
b. Aid	\$ 28,256
5. PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha – Enrichment Foundation grant)	
a. Operations	\$ 3,465
b. Aid	\$ 2,567
6. Senior Blind (also reflected in above totals)	\$ 146,911
7. Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)	\$ 630,141

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services 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, 523 consumers received active VR services; of these, 55 achieved competitive employment. Consumers served by NCBVI very often have significant secondary disabilities. During the federal fiscal year, VR services were provided to 213 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 consumers 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 consumers 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 consumers obtained the following jobs: Accountants/Auditor, Assembler/Fabricator, Bill/Posting Clerk, Bookkeeping, Account/Auditing Clerk, Building Cleaning Worker, Cashier, Childcare Worker, Claims Adjuster/Examiner/Investigator, Coin, Vending/Amusement Machine Servicer/Repairer, Combined Food Preparation/Serving, Computer Systems Analyst, Cook, Counter Attendant/Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop, Courier/Messengers, Customer Service Representative, Dishwasher, Electrician, English Language and Literature Teacher-Postsecondary, Executive Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Farm Equipment Mechanics/Service Technician, Financial Manager, Fine Artist, General/Operations Manager, Graphic Designer, Healthcare Support Worker, Human Resource Assistant, Interior Designer, Interviewers, Laborer-Freight/Stock/Material Mover, Library Assistant-Clerical, Photographer, Postsecondary Teacher, Psychiatrist, Randolph-Sheppard vendor, Recreation Worker, Registered Nurse, Software Developer, Stock Clerk/Order Filler, Substance Abuse/Behavioral Disorder Counselor, Teacher Assistant, and Word Processor/Typist.

NCBVI is committed to helping consumers 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 consumers who achieve employment because of NCBVI services no longer need social security benefits or welfare.

TRANSITION SERVICES

Background

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

meaningful experiences for blind and visually impaired youth to try to insure successful integration into work and civic life.

Over the past four years, our philosophies and efforts have received increased validation and focus with the passage of WIOA, the most current revision of the Rehabilitation Act, which established at the federal level specific mandates to work with young folks on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). In fact, NCBVI is required to designate fifteen percent of our vocational rehabilitation funds for efforts in (Pre-ETS) initiatives. WIOA and specifically (Pre-ETS) promotes a smoother transition from school to work through greater focus to assist blind and visually impaired students aged 14-21 on several required emphasis areas; job exploration, work readiness skills, college and post-secondary exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and self-advocacy skill development.

Since the new mandates four years ago, NCBVI has dedicated a Transition Coordinator to provide services statewide and strengthen the relationships with schools, families, and local employers on behalf of blind and visually impaired children and youth. The work of this coordinator accompanies direct service work performed by field counseling staff to try to insure both short term and long-term success for this subset of consumers. Detailed below are summations of much of the programming and initiatives that NCBVI conceived, planned and executed over this past year. These programs and initiatives increase and sustain greater independence and confidence for the youth we serve.

NFB Career Mentoring Program

One of the new initiatives NCBVI began this year is a partnership with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB is the nation's leading consumer organization of blind persons who serve to provide mentorship, advocacy, and empowerment to all blind people through various initiative's and programs in order to facilitate a mentoring program, which connects blind and visually impaired adults in various occupations with our youth to help them navigate the transition years. This program serves to impart to blind youth that it is ok to be blind. They must acquire alternative ways to perform tasks that do not involve vision; they have to learn positive interaction with the sighted public; they must be able to blend into society; and they must learn how to give back and not just take from others. The mentoring program began in May and has the capacity to engage 15 mentoring relationships in ongoing rapport building and advice sharing activities. The mentors and mentees interact weekly either face-to-face or through various electronic means. Each group participates on monthly conference calls for their respective group with weekend retreats twice a year that involve Pre-ETS skill development. In addition, mentees in the program attended the national convention of the NFB in July and this year with five on board in time to be able to have this life changing experience.

Winnerfest

Winnerfest is a retreat style program held twice each academic year at a central location within the state for students who are blind or visually impaired ages 14 through 18. Winnerfest is available to students statewide. It strives to not only present employment and/or college preparation skills, but also seeks to assist students to establish a peer mentoring network of other blind or visually impaired students to share ideas and techniques for success and to try and eliminate the isolation that many low vision youth experience in their home school communities.

This year the Spring Winnerfest was entitled: “REALITY CHECK: THE FUTURE STARTS NOW!” Students explored their rapidly approaching choices through the lens of the concept that none of us knows what the future holds for our lives. All we really know is that the future starts now! While we cannot always control everything we would like to in life, we can research and plan for the future which at least gives us a better chance to succeed. Twenty-seven (27) youth were empowered to reach for higher achievement in their future endeavors in both the worlds of work and college. The participants were engaged with several Nebraska based businesses and partner agencies and completed interactive and meaningful future exploration activities. Highlights from the weekend included: a presentation by the Department of Labor on employment trends, how to evaluate what classes to take in high school, and how to determine what you want out of your life; a tour of the Bakers Candies factory, a very powerful presentation by second generation to the family business and CEO Todd Baker, regarding what he looks for in employees, how he saw their disabilities as a strength because of the view of the world it gave them, and the subsequent unique skills that they therefore possess; a volunteer work based learning activity, which was to assist the camp where we stayed in preparing a newsletter mailing; conducted an employment related scavenger hunt at the Outlet Mall near Gretna; watched “Bottom Dollar”, a documentary on sub-minimum wage employment; played a giant game of life created by our Omaha office, which assisted the students with learning about how to make realistic life choices; created a YouTube Video that attempted to share thoughts and/or ideas with other blind peers about truths they have learned regarding blindness; and more.

The fall Winnerfest doubled as a NFB Career Mentoring Weekend Retreat referenced above, and therefore, was a collaborative effort between NCBVI and the NFB. Nine (9) of the mentees from the program along with eleven (11) other Pre-ETS students attended the two days of activities. Attendees conducted debates about what accommodations to utilize at work or school; heard from a panel of employed blind Nebraskans; played a game of “To Tell the Truth” to try and discover the jobs of other blind persons; traveled non-visually to lunch in the Old Market; watched and discussed the documentary “Do You Dream in Color”, which is about four blind teen-agers coming of age; conducted mock job interviews; constructed and presented elevator speeches; and more.

WAGES 2018

This past summer WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a six week work based learning program held annually for the past 25 years in Lincoln, provided work, blindness skill enhancement and life experiences for the twelve (12) blind and visually impaired students ages 15 to 21 from across Nebraska who completed the program. Participants engaged in a wide array of preparatory experiences, lived on UNL city campus, utilized public transportation and engaged in many recreational activities beyond their jobs.

The main thrust of the program is to provide first or early work experiences that they might not be able to secure in their home communities. Students worked full-time jobs ranging between 30 and 40 hours per week. The program continues to leverage business partnerships both brand new and long term to give students an authentic experience. Here is a sampling to illustrate the wide variety of employers around Lincoln who step up each summer to assist our students: History Nebraska; Antonio’s Tastes of Lincoln; State Capitol Tours; Southeast High School custodial department; Latino American Commission; Lancaster County Records Department and Information Management; Holiday Inn Lincoln Southwest; Downtown YMCA; Canine Design; Madonna Grounds Management; and Lincoln Children’s Museum.

One exciting venture, which is tangentially related to WAGES, is that this year we were able to expand and create additional work based learning opportunities for students who have secondary disabilities that make it difficult for them to complete the traditional WAGES program. Eleven (11) students completed job placement experiences in their hometowns with adjusted work schedules and duties that fit their abilities. Several of these placements were conducted in partnership with the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), while our counseling staff facilitated others completely. When partnering, NCBVI and NCECBVI jointly developed job sites and worked together to find and train support personnel such as job readiness trainers. NCBVI, as the rehabilitation agency, paid the salaries of the supporting staff and the on the job experiences (OJE) opportunities for the individuals. This program was a huge success for both partnership development and more importantly for the students themselves. Both organizations remain excited to expand this effort in subsequent years.

Project Independence

Each summer NCBVI hosts a four-day blindness skill immersion and recreational opportunities based summer camp entitled “Project Independence”. This summer Twelve (12) youth between ages 8 and 13 attended. The theme was “Superhero in Training”. This theme served as a backdrop for discussion and program planning about why it is important for a blind person to consider adopting alternative techniques or a set of superpowers if you will, to help defeat the villains of fear, self-doubt, and low expectations that exist in the world and/or are created within oneself. Attendees participated in a competition for completing typical daily tasks with blindness alternative techniques entitled: home chore challenge, had a presentation by a blind dental hygienist, made their own catapults, ran their own energy drink and power snack business, visited the Omaha Children’s Museum, visited a blind chef in Omaha, zip lined, learned mobility through a saving the universe scavenger hunt activity, and much more.

District Based Programs

On a quarterly basis, NCBVI offers a series of meetings that parents may attend to discuss issues and build a peer network that they can leverage for advice on IEP rights, best practices for their students, etc. These sessions are face-to-face in our Omaha office, but parents statewide may also join over the telephone. This past year the group went on the road a bit and gathered in Lincoln in June to tour our Nebraska Center for the Blind. Parents are reporting much growth in empowerment by knowing one another and by increasing their understanding of their child’s future and their rights as parents.

Outreach and Collaboration

During this past year, NCBVI has made efforts to intensify our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired and other education providers. We continue to make direct visits introducing ourselves and reminding personnel that we are the vocational rehabilitation agency for youth in Nebraska who are experiencing blindness and visual impairment. NCBVI has also entered into a MOU with NDE to define our role and outline the services which may be provided when we work with blind and visually impaired students in the school setting during the transition years. Our counseling staff continue to make visits to local LEAs to discover youth unknown to NCBVI services.

NCBVI continues to collaborate with NCECBVI, which was referenced above. NCECBVI is a statewide program and facility for blind school-aged youth based out of ESU4. NCBVI participated as a stakeholder in NCECBVI’s annual advisory meeting. NCBVI administrative and supervisory

staff have met with their administrative team to develop joint programming opportunities and establish collaborative agreements. Our two organizations jointly presented a workshop at the statewide transition conference to try to demystify how we are similar and different and what our perspective roles are within the transition process for blind youth in the state. NCBVI counseling staff also conduct monthly group sessions in their facility, which are designed to help severely disabled students strengthen their social and work skill abilities.

In addition, NCBVI transition staff help plan and present at various ESU Transition Conferences. Our staff also sit on various regional meetings of sped directors and transition professionals, including, the transition practitioner's advisory group. NCBVI also continues to present at courses of special education teacher preparation at UNL, which are conducted by the director of the teachers of the visually impaired endorsement program and other faculty. The Transition Coordinator continues to serve on an advisory committee at UNL. This committee was 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, which is 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.

Another additional opportunity that NCBVI took this year to raise our visibility and build our capacity within the field of transition in the state was to host a panel discussion at the statewide transition conference put on by NDE. This session spoke to the need to raise expectations for all students with sensory disabilities. Therefore, we included panelists and parents who were deaf and hard of hearing, TBI, Autism and other groups, which often accompany blindness.

Raising our visibility has been and continues to be one of the priorities for NCBVI 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.

NCBVI has striven this year 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.

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 15,000 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 set up 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 14 three-day stays this fiscal year. Seventy-one percent of consumers that participated in a three-day stay returned for the full Center training program. This percentage would be higher, but due to the lack of vacancy in the apartments, three of the students are slated to begin their full time center training in January of 2019.

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 Consumer 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, comes 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. The Center tries to have the students participate in at least one activity per month. A total of 14 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. When a three-day stay is involved, the apartment technician also coordinates a dinner with students, to welcome the three-day stay participant.

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 three 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 33 tours this fiscal year.

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 SERVICES

NCBVI Technology Services provides technology services to blind and visually impaired consumers and current and potential employers of the blind across the state. The Technology Team consists of a Technology Manager based in Lincoln and three Technology Specialists based in Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha. Consumers 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 consumers need for achieving their vocational goals.

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

The Technology 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 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 consumers. 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.

Technology Specialists work with employers and consumers to ensure that they have the resources necessary to meet the consumer'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, Cabela's-Kearney, Central Community College-Grand Island, Central Community College-Hastings, 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 consumers 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 Manager and Technology Specialists engage in public relations activities to educate business professionals, 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 consumers 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 consumers. 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 consumers under the age of 55; the OIB Program serves consumers age 55 years of age and older. IL/OIB consumers receive training and services promoting greater independence in the home and full participation in community life.

During federal fiscal year 2018, 46 IL and 440 OIB consumers received active independent living services. Of the IL consumers: one consumer was 55 years of age or over; 25 were 20 to 55 years of age and 20 were under 19 years of age.

Blind and visually impaired consumers 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 occasional group independent living skills training for blind and visually impaired seniors. 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 2018, 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 2019 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 fourteen licensed vendors and two in training currently running vending facilities. NBE licensees manage many sites statewide and two cafeterias; including the Cafeteria at the Department of Transportation building in Lincoln and the Nebraska State office building in Lincoln. 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 including the Norfolk Regional Center and an exciting opportunity at Offutt Air Force base. NCBVI is continuously building the program and creating more jobs for blind and visually impaired people.

In 2018, 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:

- Veteran's Administration Lincoln
- Denny Federal Building Lincoln
- NSOB Cafeteria and Vending
- Nebraska State Capitol
- DEQ, 12th and N Streets
- Nebraska History Museum
- Joint Forces Headquarters
- DAS 1526 K Street
- Community Corrections Center
- White Hall
- Immigration Services 850 S Street
- Homeland Security Nebraska Service Center
- Executive Building Lincoln
- 501 Building Lincoln
- Nebraska State Penitentiary
- Department of Transportation Lincoln
- State Lab Building
- Corrections Administration Building
- Omaha Main Post Office
- Omaha State Office Building
- Zorinsky Federal Building Omaha
- Federal Court House Omaha
- National Parks Administration Omaha

Citizenship Information Service Omaha
Airport Post Office Omaha
Douglas County Civic Center Complex
Military Processing Facility Omaha
Papillion Post Office
Ralston Post Office
West Center Road Post Office
Boys Town Post Office
Millard Post Office
Stoney Ridge Post Office
Social Security Administration, Omaha
Norfolk Post Office
Craft State Office Building.

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

NCBVI is currently beginning training for two possible new licensees in the coming year. All prospective licensees are 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 as well as 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.

In addition, the NBE Licensee's Committee met quarterly in 2018 and they were provided training at each of the meetings.

NBE STATISTICS

Gross Sales	Set Aside
\$1,094,494.22	\$20,782.91

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska nineteen 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 505 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 361 state newspapers; 5 Nebraska-based newspapers, 13 national papers, 17 international papers, 5 Spanish publications, 32 breaking news publications, and 72 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 2,031 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 as well as via email and smart phone or tablet apps.

Radio Talking Book Services (RTBS) 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 RTBS; it is also now available via the internet. Although there are books and magazines available for the blind and visually impaired, there is still a daily informational void that blind people experience. RTBS 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 (NFBN) and the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska(ACBN): 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 ACBN coordinates subsidized half-fare taxi coupon programs for blind and visually impaired consumers living in the Lincoln “Give a Lift” and Omaha “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.