

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

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2019**



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NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2019

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, as well as for independent living services for older individuals who are blind or visually impaired. 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 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 eight of the past nine years NCBVI has received significant Reallotment funding of the VR program 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 the VR program. This improved significantly in 2019, but will likely never reach the level of consistent funding we were used to.

Social Security Reimbursement funds were \$315,359 in 2019, down almost 50% from \$616,446 in 2018. SSA Reimbursement is soft money and therefore not a dependable source of funding. Below we show this funding in two places, the program it was spent on and the Social Security Reimbursement funds received.

Expenditures July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019

1. Basic Support	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 3,752,453
b. Aid	\$ 604,527
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 318,818
b. Aid	\$ 105,214
3. Supported Employment	
a. Operations	\$ 3,609
b. Aid	\$ 23,724
4. Independent Living Part B/State IL	
a. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 29,781
b. Aid	\$ 7,948
5. PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha – Enrichment Foundation grant)	
a. Operations	\$ 738
b. Aid	\$ 11,018
6. Senior Blind (also reflected in above totals)	\$ 131,702
7. Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)	\$ 315,359

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, 493 consumers received active VR services; of these, 33 achieved competitive employment. Consumers served by NCBVI very often have significant secondary disabilities. During the federal fiscal year, VR services were provided to 206 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.

VR 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: Automotive Service Technicians/Mechanics, Business Operation Specialist, Child/Family/School Social Worker, Community Health Worker, Court Reporter, Customer Service Representative, Database Administrator, Dispatcher, Educational/Guidance/School and Vocational Counselors, Elementary School Teacher, Financial Specialist, First-Line Supervisor of Production Operating Workers, General Manager, Janitor/Cleaner, Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Worker, Machinist, Media and Communication Equipment Worker, Nursing Assistant, Occupational Therapist, Paralegal/Legal Assistant, Physical Therapist, Randolph-Sheppard blind manager, Receptionist/Information Clerk, Residential Advisor, Sales Representative, Skincare Specialist, Social/Community Service Manager, Substance Abuse/Behavioral Disorder Counselor, and Teacher Assistant.

In March 2019, we had to enter into Order of Selection, putting clients on a wait list until we could have the funds to serve them. Do to extra reallocation and state funds, we were able to serve all individuals who are in the wait list and plan to get off Order of Selection by March 2020. NCBVI is committed to helping consumers achieve high quality competitive employment outcomes, not just the first available job, but full-time careers with good wages and benefits including health insurance and opportunities for advancement. Many of the consumers who achieve employment as a result of NCBVI services no longer need social security benefits or welfare.

TRANSITION SERVICES

NCBVI prides itself on being a leader for the last three decades in providing meaningful work experiences, job exploration counseling, work readiness skills, post-secondary education exploration, training in independent living skills, and self-advocacy and peer mentoring opportunities to blind and visually impaired youth to ensure a successful integration into society.

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the most current revision of the Rehabilitation Act, an emphasis has been placed on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). NCBVI is mandated to invest fifteen (15) percent of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funds on Pre-ETS direct services. WIOA promotes a smoother transition for Pre-ETS students from school to work through a greater focus on job exploration, work readiness skills, post-secondary exploration, work-based learning experiences, and self-advocacy skill development for blind and visually impaired students ages 14-21.

NCBVI has a Transition Coordinator as well as other agency staff who provide services on a statewide basis in order to strengthen the relationships with schools, families, and local employers to ensure short-term and long-term success for blind and visually impaired youth. Below are highlights from some of the programs NCBVI provided to increase independence and confidence in the youth we serve.

NFB Career Mentoring Program

NCBVI's ongoing partnership with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) continued to serve transition age Nebraskans who are blind or have low vision by providing mentorship, advocacy, and empowerment by connecting blind and visually impaired adults in various occupations with our youth to help them navigate the transition years. In addition to supporting the assertion of the normality of blindness through the self-actualizing concept that it is okay to be blind, the mentees were motivated to master alternative ways to perform tasks that do not involve vision. Through skill acquisition and increased confidence based on high expectations, they learn how to positively interact with the sighted public. They were expected to be able to integrate themselves into the broader society by competing on terms of equality, both by advocating for appropriate accommodations as well as accepting equal responsibilities. In this way, transition youth who are blind or have low vision experienced the freedom of giving back by standing out for their unique contributions rather than being perceived as recipients of charity.

The mentoring program is in its second year and has exceeded its capacity by engaging up to 25 work-based experiential learning opportunities led by successful blind adult role models in the community. Mentees engaged in projects ranging from automobile repair, facility management, Business Enterprise Program, tandem, and bicycle assembly and maintenance. The mentors and mentees interacted weekly through face-to-face, social media, and video conferencing. Mentees and mentors participated separately on monthly conference calls to provide ongoing review and evaluation of the program. Twice annual weekend retreats involve Pre-ETS skill development and hands-on confidence building activities. Several mentees in the program attended the life changing experience at the annual NFB convention in July. In addition to becoming equipped with the tools for career success, these young people developed leadership skills to complete the circle of learning by becoming mentors, themselves.

WAGES

The WAGES (Work and Gain Experience in the Summer) program, is a six-week work based learning experience program held annually in Lincoln for blind and visually impaired youth in Nebraska. The WAGES program provided work opportunities, blindness skills training, and life experiences for fourteen (14) blind and visually impaired youth ages 16 to 21. The youth engaged in a wide variety of enrichment activities, lived on the UNL campus, utilized public transportation to and from work, and participated in many recreational activities beyond work that enhanced their independent and advocacy skills.

The main purpose of the WAGES program is to provide meaningful work experiences to blind and visually impaired youth who may not be able to obtain them otherwise. Through continuous local business partnerships, the youth worked fulltime jobs ranging between 30 and 40 hours per week at Nebraska Games and Parks; Antonio's Tastes of Lincoln; State Capitol Tours; Lincoln Southeast High School custodial department; Latino American Commission; UNL Children's Center; Bennett Martin Library; Willa Cather Dining; Lancaster County Records Department and Information Management; Holiday Inn Lincoln Southwest; Canine Design; and Lincoln Children's Museum.

This year in conjunction with WAGES, NCBVI collaborated with the International School of Protocol to provide a workshop called Blind and Socially Savvy Strengths Series: Social Integration for Career and College Success. Over two separate weekends the WAGES participants engaged in social and professional skills training in communication, dining etiquette, and integration into the workplace and academic environments. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage youth to broaden their horizons and to step outside their comfort zones through applying strategies to meet new people, finding groups who support their interests, and expanding their social and professional networking circles.

The youth practiced newly acquired networking skills with professionals in the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce's Young Professionals Group through demonstrating how to appropriately use technology within social and work contexts as well as how to appropriately behave during work and social situations. In addition, the youth planned and organized a networking event for their co-workers from their work sites at Niehardt Hall to gain knowledge and feedback on their skills related to appropriate dress, nonverbal communication, and proper conversation. They also participated in informational interviews on social integration as well as learned about the importance of following up, self-advocating, and asking for help. Throughout the program, participants also acquired the skills of locating new venues, taking the "next steps" to join groups, using public transportation, walking using orientation and mobility skills, and interacting with vendors at a public event and concert.

Project Independence

Project Independence (PI) is a summer camp for youth ages 8 and 13 to immerse themselves in blindness skills training and enrichment activities. This summer's PI theme was "Independence is Epic." Twelve (12) youth participated in completing daily tasks with blindness alternative techniques, attended a presentation by a blind guide dog user, created tie dye t-shirts, played beeping kickball and human foosball, operated a taco shop business and served their families, learned orientation and mobility through a sensory exploration scavenger hunt, and enjoyed a wide variety of other opportunities. These activities are designed to enhance the independent living and advocacy skills of the participants.

Outreach and Collaboration

During this past year, NCBVI continues to make efforts to strengthen our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired (TVI's) and other education providers by visiting Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in order to reach out to as many youth as possible. We continue to reach out and visit schools introducing ourselves and reminding staff that we are the vocational rehabilitation agency for blind and visually impaired youth in Nebraska. In addition, NCBVI has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with NDE to define our roles and outline the Pre-ETS services we may provide to blind and visually impaired youth during their school transition years.

NCBVI continues to collaborate and partner with the Nebraska Center for the Education for Children Who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI). 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 as well as partnered to develop joint programming opportunities and establish collaborative agreements. NCBVI staff also conduct monthly group training sessions in their facility, which are designed to help severely disabled students strengthen their social and work skill abilities.

In June, NCBVI partnered with NCECBVI to host a camp for blind and visually impaired students where NCBVI paid tuition for mutual students in order for the students to attend the camp as well as had agency staff work during the camp. This allowed mutual students to have the opportunity to develop skills and prepare for transition to adulthood. In addition, NCBVI also partnered with NCECBVI to arrange Summer Work Based Learning Experiences for our mutual students through approaching businesses and hiring and training Workplace Readiness Trainers. This project and partnership allowed valuable data to be collected as well as taught the students more about the world of work.

NCBVI staff continue to help plan and present at various ESU Transition Conferences. Our staff sit on various regional committees of special education directors and transition professionals, which includes the transition practitioner's advisory committee. This committee was formed through the Mid-Plains Professional Upgrade Partnership – Sensory Disabilities grant given to teachers of the deaf and blind preparation programs by the OSEP office. This Advisory committee will meet annually to review progress, evaluate program data, and provide suggestions through the project's completion in 2021. Furthermore, NCBVI staff present at various colleges and universities about blindness, which includes courses for the special education teacher preparation program at UNL conducted by the director of the teachers of the visually impaired endorsement program and other UNL faculty.

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.

In the summer of 2019, NCBVI began welcoming older blind consumers into the Center, which includes the Center apartments. Nebraskans over the age of 55 experiencing vision loss are eligible to attend the Center through the use of state issued Senior Blind funds. Older blind consumers participating in the center gain the necessary independent living skills and acquire the proper resources to remain in their homes. By immersing themselves in comprehensive residential training, blind seniors can avoid moving into assisted living facilities and reduce the pressure on their friends and family. In 2019, NCBVI welcomed four seniors into the Center.

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 15 Three-Day Stays this fiscal year. Eighty 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 consumer's schedules, one of the students is slated to begin their full time center training in January of 2020.

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, which is led by the Department of Labor (Workforce Development). Center students also meet with the Center supervisor, 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. The Center tries to have the students participate in at least one activity per month. A total of eight activities were held during this fiscal year. This number is lower than most years, due to the recent financial challenges NCBVI is recovering from.

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 served at least fourteen 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 are 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 thirty-two tours this fiscal year.

Special efforts were made this year to expand opportunities and programs for both staff members and students alike.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The NCBVI Technology Program 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 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.

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 consumers and complete job responsibilities more effectively.

The Technology Specialists work 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 Specialists have assisted the State of Nebraska with accessibility testing and remediation strategies for the Payroll and Financial Center, Employee Work Center, the Employee Development Center, and NEO.gov. 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. 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.

NCBVI continues to strive to meet the Federal grantors regulations subsequent to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in efficiently and successfully utilizing the tools described below. Two pertinent pieces of WIOA to the technology program are the 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 changed and precipitated major modifications in the federal reporting frequency and structure. NCBVI contracts with Alliance Enterprises for the AWARE platform to comply with federal reporting requirements. The AWARE platform is used by over 35 Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. The software' developers created interfaces and reports to reflect the needed data collection and reporting required by 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.

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 Leadership Lincoln, Don't Panic Labs, Nebraska Supreme Court, Oregon Trail Insurance, Awareness Counseling, NelNet, Nebraska Department of Transportation, Affluent Health Advisors, Latino American Commission, Lincoln Children's Museum, Seward Motor Freight, Warren Distribution, Air Methods-Omaha, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, State Farm Insurance, Midwest Eye Clinic, CHI, Nebraska Medicine, Metro Community College, Blair Community Schools, University of Nebraska Omaha, Heartland Workforce Solutions, Plattsmouth Public Schools, Midland University, Lydia House/Open Door Mission, Omaha Public Schools, Target, U.S. Postal Service, Midwest Gastrointestinal Associates,

Five Nines, Hillcrest Health, Department of Corrections, American Title, Omaha Steaks, Immanuel, Mosaic, Connections Shelter, Wood River Elementary School, Callaway Public School, Sunheat International, Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, North Platte High School, Regional West Medical Center, Alliance High School, University of Nebraska Kearney, Thermo King, Central Valley Public Schools, McCook Junior and Senior High Schools, Central Community College, Valentine Middle and High Schools, Pac 2 Daycare, Broken Bow High School, Zion Lutheran School, Pioneer Memorial Rest Home, Kearney High School, Grand Island High School, and Grand Island Central Catholic High 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 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 as well as iPads and can demonstrate these to our consumers. NCBVI also has relationships with local access technology dealers 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 (IL) 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 while the Older Individuals who are Blind OIB Program serves consumers age 55 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 2019, 76 IL and 421 OIB consumers received active independent living services. Of the IL consumers: one consumer was 55 years of age or over; 41 were 20 to 54 years of age and 34 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 at the Nebraska Center for the Blind.

Three Orientation Counselors and a Program Specialist serve the entire state, reaching many traditionally underserved populations, especially those in rural areas. The Unicameral increased our senior blind services funds to \$642,000, which will help to hire more teachers, provide services without closing their cases after six visits; and purchase equipment. Field counselors 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, which may include cooking, shopping, housekeeping, money identification, telling time, recordkeeping, managing mail, payment of bills, and such.

NCBVI offers group independent living skills training on a statewide basis and in each district for blind and visually impaired seniors as well as group teachings to blind and visually impaired youth. These programs give consumers 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, technology, 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 such. 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 2019, The Enrichment Foundation awarded NCBVI a grant in support of PILBO (Promoting Independent Living for the Blind of Omaha), for blind and visually impaired individuals under 55-years-old living in Douglas and Sarpy Counties in need of access technology and services to maintain independence in the home. This fund will be sent to us in January, 2020 for the amount of \$15,000.

Appropriations from the Unicameral of Annual state funds in the amount of \$40,000 for the biennium 2019-2020 had replaced the loss of some federal funds to serve individuals who are blind under 55-years-old; 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

The Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Program 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 as well as other vending sites. NBE's support across the state includes one full-time staff member and 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 (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 16 licensed vendors currently running vending facilities. NBE licensees manage many facilities statewide, which include two cafeterias; the cafeteria in the Nebraska State office building in Lincoln as well as the new USSTRATCOM building cafeteria located on the Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue. NBE maintains over 300 vending machines in federal, state and local buildings, which include all 20 rest areas on Interstate 80 across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on many new vending opportunities, which include the Nebraska Department of Corrections.

In 2019, there were 85 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 Lincoln
- Nebraska State Capitol Vending and Catering
- DEQ, Building Lincoln
- Nebraska History Museum Lincoln
- Nebraska Historical Society Lincoln
- Joint Forces Headquarters Lincoln
- DAS Building Lincoln

Lincoln Community Corrections Center
White Hall Lincoln
TSB Lincoln
Immigration Services Lincoln
Homeland Security Nebraska Service Center Lincoln
Executive Building Lincoln
501 Building Lincoln
Nebraska State Penitentiary Lincoln
Department of Corrections Central Office Lincoln
Department of Transportation Lincoln
CSI Building Lincoln
CERT Training Building Lincoln
State Lab Building
Nebraska Department of Corrections Central Office Lincoln
Lincoln Main Post Office
Omaha Main Post Office
Omaha State Office Building
Zorinsky Federal Building Omaha
Hruska Federal Court House Omaha
National Parks Administration Omaha
Citizenship Information Services Building Omaha
Airport Post Office Annex Omaha
Douglas County Civic Center Complex
MEP Building Omaha
Social Security Administration Omaha
Norfolk Post Office
Norfolk Regional Center
Craft State Office Building North Platte
North Platte Post Office
North Platte Federal Building
Hastings Post office
Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center Grand Island
Grand Island City County Building
USDA Farm Services and Immigration Building in Grand Island

The NBE program continues to grow as blind entrepreneurs are also seeing an annual increase in income as more vending sites are developed across the state. This year, new sites were added at the USSTRATCOM building on the Offutt Air Force Base for the cafeteria and vending with 3500 employees in the building. Also, the temporary addition of FEMA vending and the Nebraska State Capitol catering created more jobs.

NCBVI is continuously promoting the NBE program to increase the number of 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 and were provided training at the meetings in 2019.

NBE Statistics

Gross Sales	Set Aside
\$ 1,087,439.00	\$ 22,313.00

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska 20 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, print disabled or persons with other physical disabilities to access local and national newspapers, and a variety of other publications and magazines. Currently, there are 496 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 360 state newspapers; 2 Nebraska-based newspapers, 13 national papers, 14 international papers, 5 Spanish publications, 34 breaking news publications, and 82 magazines; all accessible by touch-tone telephone, computer, Amazon Alexa or through Apple devices. Also available are local weather alerts, 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 2,047 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. Email 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. In 2019, NFB-Newsline introduced IOS Mobile 3.0 Beta with KNFB Reader Basic. This allows subscribers to utilize the basic features of the award winning KNFB Reader, text to speech application that utilizes your devices camera. 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 being 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. We have and will continue to put the resources given to us to the most efficient use to help Nebraskans of all age's 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.