

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

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2015**



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 3
FINANCIAL REPORT..... 4
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES 5
TRANSITION SERVICES..... 7
NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND..... 9
TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM 12
INDEPENDENT LIVING/OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND PROGRAM (IL/OIB)
..... 15
NEBRASKA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE 17
NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND 19
INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES 20

**NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2015**

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

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

Four methods are used for gauging the level of client satisfaction with NCBVI services and gathering information for a needs assessment. In October 2015, a new online client satisfaction survey conducted by Gemini Research and Training (GRT), a private contractor, was initiated to assess the level of satisfaction of vocational rehabilitation clients (4 months after case closure) and students of the Nebraska Training Center for the Blind (3 months after graduation). GRT follow ups with a telephone call to non-respondents or those who cannot fill out the survey via the internet to assist with completion of the form. A Phone survey is also conducted after completion of some of the special programs, such as transition programs and Employment Conferences. Clients served in the independent living track are mailed a customer satisfaction survey six months after case closure. The last form of feedback is via input from consumers received at public meetings and forums, held four times a year with the Board of Commissioners, twice a year at State conventions of consumer organizations, and other times as requested.

FINANCIAL REPORT

NCBVI had non-federal match enabling the capture of reallotment funds available last summer, from states unable to meet the full match for federal funds. The past six years have shown significant reallotment funding of the VR program that NCBVI has been able to draw down to enhance our infrastructure, work with the newest innovations in blindness rehabilitation, and restructure the placement of assets to ready ourselves for our new law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA.)

We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds during 2015. The amount in 2015 was significantly less than 2014 and would appear to be lesser yet in 2016. SSA Reimbursement is not a particularly dependable source of funding. We currently show this funding in two places, the program it was spent on and the Social Security Reimbursement funds expended.

Expenditures July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015

1. **Basic Support**

A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 3,954,123
B. Aid	\$ 860,344

2. **Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program**

A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 306,240
B. Aid	\$ 52,776

3. **Supported Employment**

A. Operations	\$ 0
B. Aid	\$ 3,145

4. **Independent Living Part B**

A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 105,234
B. Aid	\$ 46,144

5. **In-Service Training Grant**

A. Operations (only)	\$ 18,699
----------------------	-----------

6. **PILBO**

A. Operations	\$ 927
B. Aid	\$ 7,597

7. Senior Blind	\$ 128,250
------------------------	------------

8. **Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)**

A. Operations	\$ 445,171
B. Aid	\$ 122,585

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 provides 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 federal fiscal year (FFY) 2015, 602 clients received active VR services; of these, 50 achieved competitive employment. Clients served by NCBVI very often have significant secondary disabilities. During FFY 2015, VR services were provided to 593 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 they had been in the past. Regardless of the secondary disabilities involved, NCBVI counselors work with clients to build self-confidence and high expectations, to gain the skills of blindness, and to achieve their personal vocational goals.

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

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

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

During the past year, NCBVI clients attained employment in the following positions: assembler, auto repair shop owner, Banquet and set-up person, business operations specialist, cashier, counselor, customer service representative, elementary schoolteacher, food service worker, greeter, high school teacher, industrial/mechanical designer, life coach, lube technician, maintenance and repair worker, monitor and evaluation project manager, nurse, occupational therapist, personal care attendant, Randolph-Sheppard vending operator, receptionist, security guard, tree-trimmer/arborist, usher, and waitress. In addition NCBVI provided services making it possible for clients to retain employment in the following positions: assembler, automotive technician, braille transcriptionist, customer service representative, farmer, high school teacher, loan officer, medical transcriptionist, mental health counselor, Receptionist, Telephone solicitor, vending operator, and warehouse clerk.

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

TRANSITION SERVICES

NCBVI has long recognized the need for transition services as early as possible. Meaningful work experiences and training in independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up. In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act revised The Rehabilitation Act placing even greater emphasis on pre-employment transition services promoting a smoother transition from school to adult life. In October 2015, NCBVI hired a Transition Specialist to provide transition services statewide and strengthen the relationships with schools, families, and local employers on behalf of blind and visually impaired children and youth.

Work opportunities and special programs for transition students emphasize the development of social skills, work ethics, and a work history, all of which contribute significantly to eventual success in the workplace as adults. This past summer, WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a 6-week program held in Lincoln, provided work experiences for 7 blind and visually impaired students. During the first few days of the program, students received intensive orientation and mobility instruction to become familiar with the UNL campus where they were housed and the near downtown area. They were then able to travel to and from work independently each day using public transportation. Throughout the program, students participated in weekly seminars focused on proper work behaviors and blindness issues and interacted with positive adult blind role models who hold competitive jobs. The WAGES coordinator was in constant contact with the employers during the duration of the program to ensure the success of the students in the work place. The staff also worked closely with employers, encouraging them to raise their expectations of individuals who are blind. In addition, WAGES participants had challenging activities such as grilling their own burgers under sleepshades, laser tag, go-cart driving, travelling to a Farmer's Market, attending a College Workshop, paddle-boating, navigating an obstacle course and rock wall climbing, horseback riding, and many other activities; all geared to the development of personal skills and self-confidence in all aspects of life.

The students worked a variety of jobs at locations around Lincoln. These included St. Elizabeth's Hospital delivering sheets, gowns, and other essential to different parts of the hospital; Capitol Humane Society cleaning bowls and delivering pots and pans; Antonio's Tastes operating a cash register and serving food; State Capitol Tours conducting tours; Southeast High School doing custodial work; Latino American Commission gathering information for a database; Aging Partners preparing and serving food and odd jobs; and Lancaster County Records Department shredding documents and data entry.

Two other transition programs are Winnerfest and Project Independence (PI). Blind and visually impaired teenagers from across the state participate in Winnerfest, a 3-day program held twice a year. Twenty-one blind and visually impaired students attended Winnerfest in March and 18 in November. Activities were focused on the importance of community involvement and development of personal self-awareness and self-confidence. Blind children aged 6 through 13 participated in PI, a 4-day summer camp experience. Sixteen campers have the opportunity to be with other blind children and learn the alternative, non-visual skills of blindness. The theme for PI this year was, "Keep Calm and Believe in Blindness."

For many years, the Nebraska Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired was a collaborative effort among the Commission, the Department of Education, school districts, the Nebraska Center for Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, the Nebraska Department of Education Deaf-Blind Project, consumer organizations and other entities. The primary purpose was to share information with each other, improve relations and services for youth, and promote an understanding of the issues and critical needs of the students involved in the education and transition process. A work-product of the Team was a protocol which is helping to build partnerships between the transition stakeholders in the state. The document was finalized and continues to be disseminated across the state to educational entities, early child hood agencies, consumers, and parents.

The Transition Team was dissolved after the protocol was developed. Now, more emphasis is placed on NCBVI's collaboration with educators and parents following guidance from the protocol across the state. NCBVI personnel also continue to be active in the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment System in Omaha, Lincoln, and Greater Nebraska.

NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Nebraska Center for the blind is a comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training facility for blind adults living in Nebraska. The Center provides approximately fifteen thousand hours of training each year on average.

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. A tour of the Center is arranged for those clients expressing a need and interest in Center Training. To further facilitate an informed choice, a Three-Day Stay experience in the Center is arranged after this tour for those who want to explore the possibility of comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training in the Center.

During the Three-Day Stay, clients 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. Clients 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 16 Three-Day Stays this fiscal year; one was a client from Kansas. Eighty-seven percent of clients participating in a Three-Day Stay returned for the full Center Training program.

The Center utilizes "Structured Discovery" instruction, the leading cognitive based training methodology in the field of blindness rehabilitation today. The Center played a large part in pioneering this approach to learning in the field of rehabilitation for the blind. Through this model, 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.

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 functional 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 truly rely upon 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 which is peer led and focused on issues related to blindness. Another two hours is set aside for a vocational seminar that is led by the Department of Labor (Workforce Development). Center students also meet with the Client Services Counselor, when necessary, regarding more personal issues, goals, and objectives through counseling and guidance.

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

Real world experiences during activities or classroom instruction help consumers gain firsthand experience interacting with the sighted public. This provides consumers with the opportunity to develop the insights and confidence necessary to effectively respond 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, county fairs, fishing, paddle boats, challenge ropes courses, art shows, college and employment workshops, movie activities featuring video description, engaging in traditional holiday events, community service projects, and other volunteer efforts. Up to four activities can be scheduled each month. A total of 51 activities were held during FFY 2015.

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

Center students live independently in furnished, efficiency residential apartments located in downtown Lincoln. NCBVI support of Center students 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 10 students per annum. During this fiscal year, the Center served 14 students who attended the full comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training program. New staff members go through Center Training for a period of 600 hours, eight hours per day, and 5 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 five 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 47 tours this fiscal year, and blindness awareness training was provided to 89 Bryan Nursing students. The Nebraska Center for the Blind also has assisted South Carolina, Missouri, Virginia, and Oklahoma in blindness training for 11 new staff as well as assisted Alabama via the phone and internet. The Center continues to assist Nebraska Business Enterprise staff in evaluating prospective candidates interested in a career in self-employment.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

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

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

The technology program manager continues to 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 Program Manager has assisted the State of Nebraska with accessibility testing and remediation strategies for the Payroll and Financial Center, Employee Work Center, and the Employee Development Center. NCBVI does not have the capacity or the responsibility to be the primary source of accessibility testing and remediation for the State of Nebraska, but does provide consultation to those projects directly touching the work of staff members and the lives of clients. 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 has completed a year-long process to make its printed documents more accessible to blind staff and constituents. This was done through the purchase of a Lexmark copying machine for our Lincoln District and administrative offices. The machine is equipped with two accessibility solutions. One provides spoken output of the status of the copier when a keystroke is pressed so that the user can determine whether the printer is ready or if there are items to be addressed before it can be used such as no paper, low toner, or a paper jam. The other is a web page that can be accessed via connected computers so that the user can control copy and scan jobs. In addition, the copier is equipped with OCR software that takes printed documents inserted into the document feeder and turns them into Searchable PDF files. Although visually these files look like other scanned image documents, they contain underlying data that includes the recognized text of the document so that the file can be read with screen access software, which turns text into spoken or Braille output.

With the advent of new regulations by our federal partners and the need to streamline our business practices, NCBVI has initiated a process of replacing its current client data management system. The current system was donated by the Iowa Department for the Blind and then heavily customized by the Office of the CIO and NCBVI. NCBVI would like to leverage the advantages of a commercially available off-the-shelf system to remain current with new regulations, preserve accessibility with screen access software, and work with new mobile devices and browsers. The goal is to have a new system operational by October of 2016. To this end, NCBVI

has been evaluating commercially-available systems and working with the Office of the CIO and Materiel State Purchasing to create a request for proposal.

Technology Specialists work with employers and clients to ensure that they have the resources necessary to meet the client's vocational goal, and to work with the systems used by the business. This past year, consultations were provided to the Office of the CIO, Department of Administrative Services State Personnel, Department of Administrative Services Materiel Division, Apogee Retail, Vocational Rehabilitation in Hastings and North Platte; Pine Ridge Job Corps; Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte; Grand Island Senior High School; Northwest High School in Grand Island; Western Iowa-Nebraska Association on Higher Education and Disability; University of Nebraska at Kearney; Region 1 Office of Human Development in Sidney; ESU 10 in Kearney; Centris Federal Credit Union, Department of Corrections, Lincoln Treatment Centers, Northeast Community College, Lincoln Public Schools, among others.

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

The Technology Program Manager and Technology Specialists engage in public relations activities to educate business people, consumers, and the general public about the capabilities of blind and visually impaired individuals who use access technology. Technology Specialists also hold memberships in the Association of Information Technology Professionals and the Greater Nebraska Workforce Investment Board.

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

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

Technology is advancing at a rapid pace. More and more mainstream software and hardware developers are incorporating accessibility features into their product designs. For example, Apple provides a screen reading package called VoiceOver in all of their products. It allows blind people to read what is on the screen of their Apple device with spoken output or in Braille using a refreshable Braille display device. Google provides accessibility through the TalkBack screen reader on its Android Platform. Many NCBVI staff members use iPhones in their daily work, and each office has demonstration iPad and iPad mini units. Many staff members are also using iPads and can demonstrate these to our clients. The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) has mandated a greater focus on transition-age youth. The technology team will aid NCBVI in these efforts by demonstrating technologies and training students and teachers in their use. Technology staff will also work with Windows 10 as well as other new hardware and software.

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

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

During federal fiscal year 2015, six hundred two (602) IL/OIB clients received active independent living services. Four hundred seventy-three (473) clients were 55 years of age or over; one hundred twenty-nine (129) were under 55 years of age. Fifty-two (52) were between the ages of 5 and nineteen (19) and two (2) were under 5 years of age.

Blind and visually impaired clients receive training in the alternative skills needed to pursue personal and vocational 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.

Twelve (12) 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.

Each of the three NCBVI districts offer group independent living skills training for blind and visually impaired seniors: Senior Adventures in Independent Living (SAIL) in the Omaha district, Group Alternative Techniques Experiences (GATE) in the Lincoln district, and For Your Independence (FYI) in the North Platte district. The Omaha and Lincoln districts also provide group teaching to blind and visually impaired teenagers.

A 4-day statewide group teaching program, Home Teaching Plus, was held in Lincoln last May for blind and visually impaired seniors. This program gave participants the opportunity to bolster their confidence in the skills they've learned 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 service accessed by radio and television; 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 2015, 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 2016 with \$10,000.

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. NCBVI's support of NBE entrepreneurs across the state includes two staff members, 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 management services provided and for new equipment, repairs, and support needed to keep the licensees fully and efficiently operating.

There are fifteen licensed vendors and one in training currently running vending facilities. NBE licensees manage over 95 sites and run three cafeterias, maintaining more than 300 machines in federal, state and local buildings. This also includes all 20 rest areas on Interstate 80 across Nebraska. NBE is currently working on many new vending opportunities with the Department of Agriculture, Immigration, and two new TSA locations.

In 2015, 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:

Five break rooms, 1124 Pacific, Main Post Office, Omaha
INS, 1717 Avenue H, Omaha
FBI, S. 120th St, Omaha
Five break rooms, Zorinski Federal Building, 1616 Capital Ave, Omaha
Federal Court House, 18th and Dodge, Omaha
Parks Service Headquarters, 700 Riverfront Drive, Omaha
City County Building, 19th Farnam, Omaha
Voc. Rehab. 120th and Q, Omaha
County Courthouse, 18th and Farnam, Omaha
700 'R' Street, Lincoln, (Main Post Office) Lincoln
INS, 850 'S' Street, Lincoln
Veterans Administration, 3800 Old Cheney, Lincoln
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Homeland Security, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE
Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Taste of Lincoln Café in the State Office Building at 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
Denney Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
State property at 1526 K Street, Lincoln
Grand Island Federal Building, West Second Street, Grand Island
Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island
Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
Nebraska State Patrol Training Academy, Grand Island
Craft state office building, North Platte
All 20 rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Sidney on Interstate 80

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska sixteen years ago with the help of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 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 435 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 335 state newspapers; six Nebraska-based newspapers, ten national papers, sixteen international papers, five Spanish publications, eighteen breaking news publications, and forty-nine 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 10 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 1,865 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is available to qualified readers free of charge, 24 hours a day, seven 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. NFB-Newsline® is the only service that makes so much information available to so many qualified subscribers.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

NCBVI personnel routinely provide information and referral services to agencies and organizations of interest to blind and visually impaired consumers. Assistance with the application process or instruction in the use of equipment issued by these agencies is also provided if needed or requested. Some of the more frequently referred to agencies and organizations include:

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

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

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

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

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