

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

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2016**



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 3

FINANCIAL REPORT..... 4

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES 5

TRANSITION SERVICES..... 7

NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BLIND.....11

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM15

INDEPENDENT LIVING/OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND PROGRAM (IL/OIB)18

NEBRASKA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE20

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND22

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES.....23

**NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
ANNUAL REPORT FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2016**

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

FINANCIAL REPORT

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

We also received Social Security Reimbursement funds during 2016. The amount in 2016 was more than 2015 and it would appear that we are off to a good start in 2017, this can change based on the investment and resources we are able to put into our customers. 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, 2015 through June 30, 2016

1. Basic Support	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 3,900,222
B. Aid	\$ 961,366
2. Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 319,452
B. Aid	\$ 57,260
3. Supported Employment	
A. Operations	\$ 0
B. Aid	\$ 22,045
4. Independent Living Part B	
A. Operations (mostly expended on direct services)	\$ 61,689
B. Aid	\$ 35,778
5. In-Service Training Grant	
A. Operations (only)	\$ 0
6. PILBO	
A. Operations	\$ 602
B. Aid	\$ 15,248
7. Senior Blind	\$ 153,040
8. Social Security Reimbursement (also reflected in above totals)	
A. Operations	\$ 551,424
B. Aid	\$ 111,484

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) 2016, 468 clients received active VR services; of these, 67 achieved competitive employment. Clients served by NCBVI very often have significant secondary disabilities. During FFY 2016, VR services were provided to 182 blind and visually impaired individuals with multiple disabilities. For example, blind and visually impaired veterans returning from active duty often have brain/head injuries as well. In addition, more people are surviving serious accidents with traumatic brain injuries than had been the case in the past. Regardless of the secondary disabilities involved, NCBVI counselors work with clients to build self-confidence and high expectations, to gain the skills of blindness, and to achieve their personal vocational goals.

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

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

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

In 2016, NCBVI clients obtained the following jobs: apartment resource person, baker, cashier, child care worker, college professor, customer service representative, custodians, day care provider, dishwasher, events coordinator, farmer, food service workers, hair dresser, high school chemistry teacher, hotel night clerk, HR representative, kitchen helper, job coach, merchandise sorter, NBE vendors, night stocker, quality control chemical inspector, Production workers, receptionist, reservationist, security guard, NCBVI summer program counselors, switchboard operator, vocational rehabilitation counselor, vocational rehabilitation technician, and waitress.

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 in a young person's life. Meaningful work experiences, exposure to successful adult role models and training in independent living skills are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up.

In 2014, WIOA revised the Rehabilitation Act placing greater emphasis on Pre-Employment Transition Services, (Pre-ETS), promoting a smoother transition from school to work. NCBVI has embraced the challenge to assist blind and visually impaired students aged 14-21 through job exploration, work readiness skills, college and post-secondary exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and self-advocacy skill development.

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

Winnerfest

Winnerfest is a retreat style program held twice each academic year at a central location for students who are blind or visually impaired ages 14 through 18 from across the state.

The Spring Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI, We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind, and the United States Association of Blind Athletes, the nation's leading organization for recreation and competitive sports activity for blind persons of all ages. It was entitled: "I Fit, You Fit, We Fit." Twenty-two (22) youth were empowered to engage in better nutrition practices, exercise more and develop more appropriate eating strategies during the teen-age years. They were also exposed to a wide range of activities some unique to blindness and others were adaptations on the classics. These included swimming, judo, goalball, bowling, volleyball serving, basketball shooting, football throwing, kickball, cardio drumming exercising and strategies for exercises in places or situations without available equipment. Students also gained leadership skills and engaged in conversations during working meals that not only covered nutrition topics but also leadership and self-advocacy. The program even empowered the students to advocate for ongoing discussion to consider how to better market Winnerfest to their peers.

The fall Winnerfest was expanded by an additional day from traditional length in order to accommodate the: Next Generation: training presented by the Dale Carnegie Corporation, adapted from their world renowned leadership trainings specifically for our Pre-ETS youth. While other youth have taken "Next Generation" training and more than eight million

individuals have taken Carnegie leadership courses, it is the belief of both the local Carnegie franchise and NCBVI that this program was the first of its kind for blind students in the country. There were twenty (20) participants who received leadership techniques, soft skills, social skills, self-advocacy skills, stress reduction strategies and work and school based readiness communication training presented in a targeted format that appealed to their age group and life experiences.

Blind and Socially Savvy

In an effort to prepare our Pre-ETS youth to be better self-advocates, improve their social and soft skills and gain confidence beyond their average sighted counterparts to help them put their best foot forward in employment, school and everyday life settings, NCBVI provided a workshop entitled Blind and Socially Savvy. This innovative training took a renowned social skills and business education curriculum from the International School of Protocol and adapted it to the unique needs of blind youth. The students learned leadership skills, social etiquette, continental dining skills, how to network, how to dress for success and much, much more. The students hosted two separate networking events where strangers to them from the world of business came to a social event to meet them and one another. The students handed out their own business cards and made a tremendous impression on others for themselves and for NCBVI in general. The program concluded with a three course graduation dinner where the students demonstrated their newly acquired eating skills and the students received a certificate for completing 40 hours of training.

The Blind and Socially Savvy program was offered and completed by twenty-three (23) Pre-ETS youth and was conducted in two sessions. The first session was for all the participants in our summer program WAGES, which is outlined below and a second time in a standalone group for youth 14 through 21 not in that program.

WAGES 2016

This past summer, WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a six week program held in Lincoln, provided work, blindness skill enhancement and life experiences for seventeen (17) blind and visually impaired students ages 16 to 21. Thanks to the increased focus on Pre-ETS services under the WIOA, we were afforded the opportunity to expand this program and the number of participants this past summer represented the largest group in the program's history. The positive benefits of this expansion were felt by both students and staff alike. Commission staff from all three geographic districts and instructors from the Nebraska Center for the Blind were all directly engaged in providing blindness skill and work based job site training throughout the duration of the program. In fact, members of the Nebraska Center staff developed and created the skill training curriculum and materials which were utilized.

Just as it has for more than 20 years now, WAGES offered a wide array of experiences, as participants lived on UNL city campus, utilized public transportation and engaged in many recreational activities beyond their jobs. For the first time this summer, WAGES participants completed work hours at both community-based employment sites and in-house training with commission staff. Through a half day schedule, each week participants completed approximately 15 or more hours in each of these settings. WAGES Students worked a wide

variety of jobs. Here is a sampling: St. Elizabeth's Hospital delivering sheets, gowns, and other essentials to different parts of the hospital; Capitol Humane Society cleaning bowls and delivering pots and pans; Antonio's Tastes of Lincoln 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.

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

ReBoot Camp

In an effort to strengthen our relationship with parents and teachers and to provide the most accessible and contemporary technology and technology training needed by blind and visually impaired transitioning youth, NCBVI conceived and conducted the first ever "reBoot Camp". This workshop was completed in a retreat format and was designed to instruct students in the use and benefits of the iPad and voiceover technology. Thirty-seven (37) youth received iPad Pros, a bundle of productivity applications, including the KNFB Reader, and a digital curriculum to help the learning to continue on into the future. Also to keep the learning going, we included teachers and parents, so that those in the student's support system also had the information their youth received and could help learning take on a greater dimension after the program concluded. This aspect of the reBoot Camp has been praised by the education professionals who often are unable to keep abreast of technology developments and who are often not able to assist students with technology they have learned from NCBVI at programs since they were not in attendance.

There were two full days of direct instruction for all and evening breakout sessions designed specifically for students and parents to meet and discuss their own specific accommodation issues. Individuals from the Omaha Apple store were also in attendance as luncheon speakers, which is a very unique event as Apple rarely allows for their instructors to attend other groups training sessions. In conclusion the more than 75 persons who attended for one reason or another will all look back with pride that they attended the first reBoot Camp for blind youth in Nebraska.

Project Independence

Each summer NCBVI hosts a four day blindness skill immersion and recreational opportunities based summer camp entitled "Project Independence". This summer fourteen youth between 6 and 13 attended. The theme was "Come Sail Away With Me", an off-shoot of the empowering

quote, “A ship is safe in a harbor but that isn’t what ships were built for”. Attendees participated in a competition for completing typical daily tasks entitled: home chore challenge, as well as, taking air boat rides, learning to listen for birds, doing audio archery, building and racing their own rain gutter ships, completing a ‘wordle’ project (for self-esteem building), cooking their own dinner over the camp fire, running their own ice cream shop, taking a field trip into Omaha, and much more.

Staff Development in Transition Service Delivery

In an effort to capture the extensive knowledge base in the area of Pre-ETS and transition amongst our staff and to collaborate across the districts and to better unify our approach with youth, NCBVI has launched an ongoing project with a Nebraska based internationally known transition consultant, Dr. Gary Meers. Staff were surveyed about best practices in order to harness our extensive knowledge base and enhance it to create an even richer set of Pre-ETS/transition activities that staff can use to shape their work with the youth we serve. Currently, Dr. Meers is meeting directly with staff to develop job strategies and overcome barriers to employment for youth in Nebraska, especially rural Areas. These meetings will yield a set of best practice guidelines and will assist our staff in developing individualized plans for transition to use uniquely with the youth they serve.

Outreach and Collaboration

During this past year NCBVI has made efforts to intensify our relationships with teachers of the visually impaired and other education providers. The Transition Coordinator and regional NCBVI staff continue to make direct visits to Educational Service Units (ESUs), introducing ourselves and reminding education personnel that we are the lead agency for youth in Nebraska who are experiencing blindness and visual impairment. Vocational Rehabilitation staff also continue to make visits to local school districts to try and build relationships and discover youth we may not have yet known about.

NCBVI continues to collaborate with NCECBVI, a state-wide program and facility for blind school-aged youth based out of ESU4. NCBVI presented at the annual meeting of vision teachers called, Spring Fling, we participated as a stakeholder in their annual meeting for this purpose and NCBVI transition staff have met with their administrative team to develop joint programming opportunities.

In addition, NCBVI transition staff helped plan and presented at the Eastern Nebraska Transition Conference. NCBVI also continues to present at courses of special education students at UNL which are conducted by the director of the vision endorsement program. It is our belief that these relationships and our programs have led to much growth in professional collaboration. Many teachers expressed interest in attending our programs and one attended the most recent Winnerfest.

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

The Nebraska Center for the Blind utilizes the "Structured Discovery" approach to training students in the alternative skills of blindness, the leading cognitive based training methodology in the field of blindness rehabilitation. Center students are provided training in 5 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 13 Three-Day Stays this fiscal year. Eighty-five percent of consumers that participated in a Three-Day Stay returned for the full Center Training program. This percentage would be higher, but there were two consumers who wanted to attend the full training program, but will need to get their severe health issues stabilized before attending the Center.

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

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

Real world experiences during activities or classroom instruction help consumers gain firsthand experience interacting with the sighted public. This provides consumers with the opportunity to develop the insights and confidence necessary to 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, Escape Room, air boat rides, fishing, paddle boats and canoes, zip lining, geocaching, art activities, 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 52 activities were held during this fiscal year.

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

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

Over the last five years, the Nebraska Center for the Blind has averaged 13 students per annum. During this fiscal year, the Center served 16 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 five days a week, to earn their Certification in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling for the Blind (CVRCB). If the employee has functional vision, then sleep shades will be worn during this training. This approach to new staff training

promotes a deeper understanding of blindness and a stronger belief in the alternative skills of blindness enabling blind people to compete on terms of equality with their normally sighted peers, and achieve greater personal independence. During this fiscal year, the Center provided training to eight 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 42 tours this fiscal year, and blindness awareness training was provided to 45 Bryan Nursing students. There were also 3 Bryan nursing students who volunteered at the Nebraska Center for the Blind this fiscal year. The Center continues to host the BELL (Braille Enrichment Literacy Learning) Program and assist Nebraska Business Enterprise staff in evaluating prospective candidates interested in a career in self-employment.

Nebraska Center for the Blind Satisfaction Survey Results

1. "Attending Center Training improved and increased my level of skills and abilities"
All six consumers (100%) agreed

2. "Attending Center Training improved my attitude, outlook, and philosophy toward my blindness"
All six consumers (100%) agreed

3. "Attending Center Training helped me advance towards reaching my educational, vocational, or personal goals"
Four consumers agreed (67%),
One consumer disagreed (16%)
One consumer was unsure/don't know (16%)

4. "Attending Center Training increased my ability to self-advocate"
Five consumers agreed (83%)
One consumer disagreed (16%)

5. "Attending Center Training improved my relationship with my family and friends"
Four consumers agreed (67%)
One consumer disagreed (16%)
One consumer was unsure/don't know (16%)

6. "Center Training was an overall positive, learning experience for me"
Five consumers agreed (83%)
One consumer disagreed (17%)

Special efforts were made this year to expand opportunities and programs for both staff members and students alike. We have and will continue to put the resources given to us to the most efficient use to help young Nebraskans transition into successful lives and careers as contributing

members of society. We will keep working and innovating until they too can take part in the “Good Life” we know this state has to offer.

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The NCBVI Technology Program provides technology services to blind and visually impaired clients and current and potential employers of the blind across the state. The Technology Team consists of a Technology Program Manager based in Lincoln and three Technology Specialists based in Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha. Clients are instructed in the use of access technologies such as screen access software, refreshable Braille, screen magnification, and personal note taking devices. In addition, instruction is provided in the use of mainstream technologies such as web browsing, use of smartphones, 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 Secretary of State sample ballots and voter registration portal, Payroll and Financial Center, Employee Work Center, the Employee Development Center, and the new Lynda.com training system. 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 launched a new web site this year. It is hosted on the Nebraska Meadowlark platform that allows easy updating of site contents and a more responsive design. This allows for visitors with various devices and screen sizes to make the most of the content presented. Meadowlark is also accessible for blind staff, at this point the Technology Program Manager, to manage site preferences and update content. This new site has been a long time in coming and has received positive reviews from NCBVI staff and consumers.

NCBVI's Federal grantors have come out with new regulations this year that had been previously proposed. This is part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Two pertinent pieces of WIOA to the technology program are its emphasis on pre-employment transition services Pre-ETS, and the significant changes to the data that needs to be included in required federal reports.

NCBVI's technology program contributed to the serving of Pre-ETS clients through a summer program called reBootCamp. This two-day event was held in Omaha and served 35 students from across Nebraska. Each student received an iPad Pro, keyboard, screen protector, and other accessories. Too often, blind students are offered a device provided by their school district that is

locked down and cannot be fully explored or have applications added to it. NCBVI's goal with the program was to provide a device that the student could learn to use and customize to meet their learning needs with no barriers. To this end, NCBVI provided a number of applications with the device and the workshop showed the students how to install and use the apps on their new iPads. Provided apps included Voice Dream Reader for accessing content in a variety of text and audio formats and Voice Dream Writer, which offers an accessible platform for taking notes and reviewing them later. The final app, the KNFB Reader, is an application that uses the device's camera to take pictures of printed pages and then read the text aloud. The text, once recognized, can be saved and shared through email or linking it with Dropbox or Google Drive.

The WIOA regulations change precipitated major modifications in the federal reporting frequency and structure. NCBVI has been pursuing the AWARE platform from Alliance Enterprises for over 3 years. Over the past year, NCBVI attempted an RFP Process and eventually signed an emergency contract. The AWARE platform is used by 35 Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and the software's developers are currently creating new interfaces and reports to reflect the needed data collection and reporting required by the new law. The AWARE system is also accessible with screen access software and devices that NCBVI's staff is currently using. In fact, AWARE is an acronym meaning Accessible Web Activity Reporting Environment. Because Alliance Enterprises, AWARE's developer, 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 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, Central Community College – Hastings, Central Community College – Kearney, Central Community College – Grand Island, Southwest Junior/Senior High School – Bartley, Loup County Public School – Taylor, North Platte High School, Project Search Wal-Mart Distribution Center – North Platte, Northwest High School – Grand Island, Grand Island Public Schools – Grand Island, Region 1 Office of Human Development – Sidney, Minden High School – Minden, Gibbon Public Schools – Gibbon, Kearney High School – Kearney, Ernst Toyota – Columbus, Southeast Community College – Milford, Prairie View Elementary School – Ogallala, Wood River Elementary School – Wood River, University of Nebraska – Kearney, Kearney Chamber of Commerce – Kearney, Pearson Education Publishing – New York City, New York, La Mexicana – Grand Island, Azteca Market – Grand Island, Cozad High School – Cozad, Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children – Omaha, St. Patrick's Catholic School – Elkhorn, NCBVI – North Platte District, Grandview Elementary School – Alliance, Nebraska Department of Labor, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Lincoln Behavioral Health Clinic, New Beginnings Counseling, Holiday Inn South, Kids First, Waverly Public Schools, Fullerton Public Schools, Master's Hand Candles, Antonio's Taste of Lincoln, Lincoln public schools, Omaha Public Schools, Apple Computer, 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, various publisher content portals and sites, and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Public school systems will too often provide textbooks to blind and visually impaired students instead of teaching them how to access the materials themselves. Teaching younger students to get excited about technology also means teaching them how to do things their sighted peers are doing, such as sending text messages and using mainstream technologies including the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Some phones contain capabilities, or can be outfitted with software that verbalizes the information on the screen or allows the user to read phone output on a device called a Refreshable Braille Display. Several blind and visually impaired students are using iPads in the classroom to take notes, read accessible books and use other applications, and for accessing information from smart boards used by the teacher. iOS, Apple's mobile operating system, is a good example of mainstream accessibility where the manufacturer builds in features that make devices useable by blind people out of the box.

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

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

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

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

During federal fiscal year 2016, 555 IL/OIB clients received active independent living services. 443 clients were 55 years of age or over; 112 were under 55 years of age. Forty-seven were between the ages of 5 and 19 and two 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 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.

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. These programs give participants the opportunity to build confidence in the alternative skills of blindness in a setting away from home. Training during this and other group teaching programs is conducted using sleep shades. Sessions include: cane travel, Braille, cooking, woodworking, problem solving, and focusing on a positive attitude toward blindness. Other training activities promote use of community resources to effectively conduct the activities of daily living.

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

of Health and Human Services, Centers for Independent Living, eye care professionals, and other service agencies.

In December 2016, 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 2017 with \$10,000.

On October 1, 2016, federal funding for independent living services for blind and visually impaired consumers under the age of 55 was discontinued. At that time, consumers under the age of 55 who did not otherwise have a vocational goal were not eligible to receive independent living services; however, consumers 55 years of age and over can still receive independent living services. NCBVI is challenged to respond to the needs of the individual adults, younger than 55, who do not have vocational goals. The need is still there for some blind Nebraskans, to remain living independently.

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 new equipment provided, repairs, and support needed to keep the licensees fully and efficiently operating.

There are sixteen licensed blind vendors and two in training currently running vending facilities. NBE licensees manage over 100 sites and run three cafeterias. This includes the dining facility at the Army National Guard in Ashland. This year we added the Nebraska State Historical society, two locations; and the Nebraska Department of Roads cafeteria and vending, creating new jobs. NBE maintains 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, Department of Corrections, and other State property locations across the state.

In 2016, there were 88 different agreements, contracts, and permits for vending or food service in Nebraska managed by NBE. Some of the locations of the NBE vending facilities are as follows:

Nebraska Dept. of Roads headquarters, five break rooms, Lincoln
Main Post Office, Omaha, 1124 Pacific, Seven break rooms
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
Nebraska CIS, 850 'S' Street, Lincoln
Veterans Administration, 3800 Old Cheney, Lincoln
Library Commission at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Homeland Security, 1301 West Highland, Lincoln, NE
Department of Environmental Quality at the Atrium, 12th and N Streets, Lincoln
Taste of Lincoln Café in the State Office Building at 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln
Denney Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln
State Office building at 1526 K Street, Lincoln
Main Post Office, West 3rd Street, Grand Island

Postal Distribution Center, Highway 30 West, Grand Island
 Nebraska State Patrol Training Academy, Grand Island
 Craft State office building, North Platte
 All 20 rest areas across Nebraska from Omaha to Sidney on Interstate 80
 UPS Distribution Center, Hwy 385, Sidney
 Progress Rail Repair Center, Sidney
 Main Post Office, 2510 S. 11th, Kearney
 Wilson's Truck Repair, Hwy 30, Grand Island
 DuVal Diesel Service, Shady Bend Road, Grand Island
 Camp Ashland Military Dining Facility, Hwy 6, Ashland
 Greenleaf National Guard Training Center, East 'J', Hastings
 Hastings Main Post Office, 300 N. Kansas Street
 Fremont Main Post Office, 348 E. 6th Street
 Norfolk Main Post Office, N. 4th Street
 Four Lincoln Post Office annexes
 Joint Forces Headquarters, National Guard Lincoln, vending
 Nebraska State Historical society museum, two locations

The program continues to grow, and blind entrepreneurs are earning higher annual income as more vending sites are developed across the state. This year, new routes were added in Lincoln, Norfolk and the North Platte district, thus creating jobs. We are beginning training for two new licensees for the coming year.

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

Business skills are developed through courses at Nebraska's Community Colleges relating to areas such as human relations, supervision, business practices, basic accounting, taxes, marketing costs, and inventory control.

The NBE Licensees Committee met in March, June, September, and December. Training sessions were provided by the NBE staff for licensees at each meeting in 2016.

NBE STATISTICS

Gross Sales	Set Aside
\$2,137,934.00	\$47,664.00

NFB-NEWSLINE® FOR THE BLIND

NFB-Newsline® for the Blind was established in Nebraska seventeen years ago with the help of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN), and continues to grow. This program is an audio information system that allows all blind, visually impaired and reading impaired persons to access local and national newspapers, and a variety of other publications and magazines. Currently, there are 477 print publications available on NFB-Newsline®. Included are 365 state newspapers; 6 Nebraska-based newspapers, 13 national papers, 17 international papers, 5 Spanish publications, 21 breaking news publications, and 62 magazines; all accessible by touch-tone telephone, computer, or through Apple devices. Also available are weekly store circulars, TV listings, and job listings. The system enables those who cannot read conventional print to have access to all content offered on NFB-Newsline® when traveling throughout the United States.

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

The number of subscribers continues to grow and there are currently 1,943 users in Nebraska. NFB-Newsline® is available to qualified readers free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in all 93 counties. Emailing and the internet are the most popular forms of communication today. NFB-Newsline® recognizes this and is constantly developing new ways to keep up to date with this fast paced world. NFB-Newsline® online was created for subscribers to browse through papers and have more access to current events without having to be connected to a telephone.

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

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

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

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

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

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

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

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