

**Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, May 4, 2013
Homestead National Monument of America, Education Center,
8523 West State Hwy 4
Beatrice, NE**

Approved Minutes

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings, lunch arrangements & other logistics.

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Commissioners present: Julie Johnson, Chairperson, York; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Nancy Oltman, Hastings; Darrell Walla, Omaha.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director IL; Wes Majerus, Program Manager Technology; Fatos Floyd, Director of the Center; Bill Brown, Business Manager; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Ashley Pinkelman, Staff Trainee/Vocational Rehab Technician; Scott Pavelka, Staff Trainee/Vocational Rehab Counselor.

Public Present: Dan Bird, driver; Hubert Paulsen, driver and meeting recorder; Jeff Altman, Laurie Jacobsen, Novelle Williams, Mortel Crawford, Pam Boose, Marietta McFarland, Sydnie Padek, Merrith Baughman, Dave Freitag, Tammy Freitag, Kenda Slavin, Mark Bulger, Glennie Weiland, Kayde Rieken, Tony Olivero, Karen Anderson, Zach Hays, Anna Givens, Alex Castillo.

Kathy Stephens announced that Valentino's will deliver pizza and salad at approximately 12 noon. Cookies, grapes and soda pop will also be available.

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Hubert Paulsen recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Act was available in both print and Braille format. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACB and NFB, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of February minutes

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the February 2, 2013 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Chairperson Johnson noted that the Minutes are located on the NCBVI website for review.

Homestead National Monument of America Partnership with NCBVI - Merrith Baughman

Merrith Baughman who is a Park Ranger at the Homestead National Monument of America gave a presentation about the Monument. Ms. Baughman stated that they are very pleased that the Commission decided to have the meeting at the Homestead National Monument of America today. Ms. Baughman noted that she is not an expert in accessibility, but it is something she has been learning about through the Homestead National Monument. She stated that she is very proud of the things they have done at the Monument with the help of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Merrith stated that she will be talking about the Monument, what they have done, some of the services they have and some of the things they hope to continue to do.

There are 401 National Parks across the country and the reason they are here is they are on the first piece of land claimed by the Homestead Act of 1862. The Homestead Act of 1862 was one of the most significant and enduring events in the westward expansion of the United States. By granting 160 acres of free land to claimants, it allowed nearly any man or woman a "fair chance." Homestead National Monument of America, located in Southeast Nebraska, commemorates this Act and the far-reaching effects it had upon the landscape and people. Located on the site of the one of the first homesteads claimed, this National Monument is a tribute to the courage and tenacity of the settlers and original inhabitants of this land. Visit Homestead National Monument of America to explore this tall grass prairie landscape, tour historic buildings and view museum exhibits that tell the story of this important era of American history.

The Homestead Act of 1862 has been called one of the most important pieces of Legislation in the history of the United States. Signed into law in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln after the secession of southern states, this Act turned over vast amounts of the public domain to private citizens. 270 million acres or 10% of the area of the United States was claimed and settled under this act.

A homesteader had to be the head of a household or at least 21 years of age to claim a 160 acre parcel of land. Settlers from all walks of life including newly arrived immigrants, farmers without land of their own from the East, single women and former slaves came to meet the challenge of "proving up" and

keeping this "free land". Each homesteader had to live on the land, build a home, make improvements and farm for 5 years before they were eligible to "prove up". A total filing fee of \$18 was the only money required, but sacrifice and hard work exacted a different price from the hopeful settlers. Merrith noted that the Homestead Act was not a good thing for American Indians and that the Monument does address that side of the story too.

The Homestead Act of 1862 is recognized as one of the most revolutionary concepts for distributing public land in American history. Repercussions of this monumental piece of legislation can be detected throughout America today, decades after the cry of "Free Land!" has faded away.

With one stroke of the pen on March 19, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created a new national park on the site of the Daniel Freeman homestead. Extensive work went on behind the scenes for nearly 30 years to see that this site would be created. As early as 1909, concerned citizens of Nebraska had urged Congress to create a national park site on the Freeman property, the location of one of the very first land parcels claimed under the Homestead Act on January 1, 1863. However, it wasn't until 1925 that Senator George W. Norris, a powerful congressional leader from Nebraska, joined the fight to see the Freeman land preserved as a national park.

In 1934, the Homestead National Park Association was formed by several prominent Beatrice citizens. It was at this point that the movement to create the park began to solidify. Senator Norris had a proposal for the creation of the national park site before the U.S. House of Representatives by August, 1935. The Homestead National Monument Act was passed on March 16, 1936. The newly-created Homestead National Monument of America was placed under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior. The National Park Service continues to operate and administer the park today as a lasting memorial to all the settlers who built the American West.

In 1971, additional legislation was passed to add the Freeman School, an original one-room prairie schoolhouse, to Homestead National Monument of America. The Freeman School provides visitors an excellent opportunity to see what it was like to be a young student on the Nebraska prairie a century ago.

The Education Center was the main visitor's center until 2007 when they opened the Heritage Center. The Heritage Center opened May 20, 2007. They did a lot to make the Center accessible. The new facility has expanded the homesteading story with new interactive displays, a magnificent view of the tall grass prairie as early pioneers might have seen and a one acre parking lot to give visitors a feeling for the enormous task homesteaders faced. This multipurpose facility brings the epic homestead story to life for visitors of all ages and demonstrates the true scope and importance of the Homestead Act of 1862.

State-of-the-art exhibits present homesteading in an interactive setting. Such topics as the Act's influence on immigration, agriculture, industrialization, native tribes, the tall grass prairie ecosystem and Federal land policies are presented in an educational and thought-provoking manner.

A diverse, detailed and complete picture of homesteading and the Homestead Act are presented at the Homestead Heritage Center. The building is designed to represent the Homestead Act of 1862 with its spectacular views and unique roof line resembling a single bottom plow moving through the sod.

Along the sidewalk entrance to the building is the "Living Wall," a physical representation of the percentage of land that was successfully homesteaded in each state. Even the parking lot is educational in nature; it is one acre in size.

In 2007 funding was received to make the exhibits and film to be audio described. At this time they reached out to the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) for assistance. She connected with Carlos Serván who got them connected with the Commission. Everyone was eager to help. Merrith noted that Carlos Serván, Jeff Altman and Fatos Floyd were all very helpful. It was a daunting task as they have over 300 photographs, 16 different exhibit areas and about three hours of audio description. Merrith noted that the audio description is very good in that the user can choose what they want to listen to. You do not need to listen to the entire audio. The audio descriptions were put into place in August 2010. After this happened, some NCBVI staff and clients came back to see it and then told them all the things they could do to make it better. Merrith noted that they are very proud of the end product. For the work that they did they received a National Park Service Award in 2010 and got to travel to Washington DC to accept the award. Merrith stated that the award that she is most proud of it that they were honored with the James Walker award.

Merrith stated that they continue to work on things at the Monument. They have now audio described all of their waysides. They also now have their brochure in Braille. Merrith noted that Stephanie Wagle worked for them in the Fall of 2011 through Spring of 2012 and all of last year. She helped them a lot by looking at their services and pointing out things that they could do better.

Merrith closed by saying that they have learned a lot over the past years about accessibility and she has learned that you must involve those who are going to use the service.

The Commissioners thanked Merrith Baughman for her presentation.

Discuss & Act on the 2013 Executive Director's Evaluation including approval of the Executive Director's Time Certification.

The Commissioners reviewed and discussed the results of the 2013 NCBVI Staff Survey. The survey is conducted to assist the Board of Commissioners to ensure employee satisfaction, Executive Director Performance and excellent consumer services. Chairperson Johnson noted that 32 staff responded to the survey which she feels is a good response rate. Chairperson Johnson thanked the staff who took the time to complete the survey.

Chairperson Johnson noted that she has rewritten each comment in her own words, as requested from staff members after the state staff meeting. Comments that stated they had no comment were left out. She also compiled the numerical averages for the first 10 questions.

Chairperson Johnson noted that today's meeting is going to be long as there is a lot to cover. Chairperson Johnson noted that she sincerely hopes that the Board, the executive director, the other administration, the various supervisors, the counselors and the support staff can all pull together to move NCBVI forward. NCBVI is kind of stuck right now. We need ideas to get us going again. Many years ago Nebraska was at the forefront of innovative blindness services. Client needs, employment and society has changed a lot since then. Chairperson Johnson noted that she thinks we are ready for the next great thing in NCBVI history.

The survey questions are rated on a score of 1 to 5.

Average 4.4

1. The executive director believes that it is respectable to be blind.

Outstanding 43.8% (14)

Above Average 43.8% (14)

Satisfactory 6.2% (2)

Needs Improvement (0)

Unacceptable (0)

Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 3.1

2. The executive director listens to concerns from staff.

Outstanding 18.8% (6)

Above Average 12.5% (4)

Satisfactory 37.5% (12)

Needs Improvement 15.6% (5)

Unacceptable 12.5% (4)

Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 3

3. The executive director responds to concerns from staff.

Outstanding 18.8% (6)

Above Average 12.5% (4)
Satisfactory 28.1% (9)
Needs Improvement 25.0% (8)
Unacceptable 12.5% (4)
Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 4

4. The executive director listens to concerns from consumers.

Outstanding 31.2% (10)
Above Average 37.5% (12)
Satisfactory 18.8% (6)
Needs Improvement 3.1% (1)
Unacceptable 3.1% (1)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 3.8

5. The executive director responds to concerns from consumers.

Outstanding 18.8% (6)
Above Average 37.5% (12)
Satisfactory 28.1% (9)
Needs Improvement 6.2% (2)
Unacceptable (0)
Unknown 9.4% (3)

Average 3.2

6. The executive director identifies priorities.

Outstanding 12.5% (4)
Above Average 31.2% (10)
Satisfactory 21.9% (7)
Needs Improvement 21.9% (7)
Unacceptable 6.2% (2)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 3.2

7. The executive director ensures identified priorities become completed tasks.

Outstanding 12.5% (4)
Above Average 21.9% (7)
Satisfactory 34.4% (11)
Needs Improvement 18.8% (6)
Unacceptable 3.1% (1)
Unknown 9.4% (3)

Average 3.4

8. The executive director negotiates creatively to hire quality staff.

Outstanding 9.4% (3)
Above Average 31.2% (10)
Satisfactory 34.4% (11)
Needs Improvement 15.6% (5)
Unacceptable (0)
Unknown 9.4% (3)

Average 3.8

9. The executive director negotiates creatively to fund exemplary service delivery.

Outstanding 25.0% (8)
Above Average 28.1% (9)
Satisfactory 34.4% (11)
Needs Improvement 6.2% (2)
Unacceptable (0)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 4

10. The executive director delivers progressive steps toward true equality for blind Nebraskans.

Outstanding 31.2% (10)
Above Average 37.5% (12)
Satisfactory 18.8% (6)
Needs Improvement 6.2% (2)
Unacceptable (0)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

The overall average for the first 10 questions is 3.6

11. Please provide any additional comments regarding the Executive Director's performance.

Pearl is frequently not in the office, since she works from home much of the time. She did not show concern for staff issues until she was forced to address the issue, then the action was only minimal. She did not speak with all staff members involved with the issue, even knowing that the staff position excluded had experienced difficulties in the past. There had been a grievance filed in the past regarding issues related to the position. Still Pearl chooses not to address the concerns. Mediation was offered after several months of very trying working conditions, including high tension, hurt feelings and half-truths. Mediation was conducted, but there was no follow up after it was finished to see if the staff felt the situation had been resolved. When a staff member went to Pearl with concerns, they were ignored and it was implied that the problem was with the staff member and not the management.

Pearl chose to ignore a recently documented grievance, which was filed based on the same concerns that were being expressed. As a result of the lack of provision of managerial direction, the staff member resigned. I encourage the Commissioners to speak with current and past center staff.

Pearl has been more available and involved during the past year.

Pearl works hard to be available to clients and staff. She has been accompanying staff to be in touch with the day to day operations of NCBVI. She is concerned with having a positive culture for staff. She is also concerned with providing quality services and opportunities for clients.

I am concerned with the relationship between counselors and management. In particular I do not feel issues have been dealt with appropriately or in a timely manner.

I like and respect Pearl a lot. However I do not feel that if I went to her with a concern about another staff person or supervisor, especially in Lincoln, that she would follow up with it. She would have one of the Deputy Directors take care of it.

I think Pearl is doing a good job, despite the difficult budget times. I think morale is an issue in some departments. I think administration sides with supervisors and don't hear the counselors concerns.

I have difficulty answering these questions, because I don't always know what is going on or what all the issues are. I appreciated Pearl coming out to observe client visits with the counselors.

It's been a very rough year for Pearl, with a couple of major issues. I am impressed with how she has been able to deal with everything on top of her huge workload.

I would appreciate Pearl asking counselors what would help us to be able to do our jobs better, in addition to the visits.

Pearl promotes professional growth and high quality employment for clients through training opportunities.

Pearl does a great job with clients. The administration could improve in the area of listening to staff concerns.

Pearl is busy or out of the office a lot, making her less accessible to staff. Pearl spends a lot of time on NCSAB duties. Perhaps these duties should be taken up by a paid NCSAB accountant or bookkeeper.

At times Pearl has difficulty concentrating on all of her duties. She is a strong advocate for client services.

There are concerns within NCBVI that are not being addressed. Supervisors need to communicate with one another, so that the counselors they supervise know what is happening. Pearl needs to ensure this is happening. Protocol needs to be followed during hiring procedures.

There is a tendency to ignore issues within the agency, instead of confronting them directly. This is especially apparent regarding personnel and management issues.

When staff brings up issues, they are told that it will be looked into and that it will be taken care of. However nothing happens. Staff issues are ignored. Administration hopes the issues will go away on their own. Staff is not free to make suggestions, without fear of being reprimanded. Staff is not treated equally.

I noticed a folder on the W drive that has a lot of NCSAB financial information. I'm not sure that we should be using State of Nebraska resources to do the books for another organization. Has the state auditor's office been consulted about this use of State of Nebraska resources? I understand and support being a member of NCSAB, but feel that do the duties for a NCSAB accounting position that once was paid should be approved by the State Auditor's office.

12. I like working for NCBVI.
Strongly Agree 43.8% (14)
Agree 31.2% (10)
Neither Agree or Disagree 18.8% (6)
Disagree 3.1% (1)
Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)
Unknown (0)

13. I have the training and support I need to do my job.
Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)
Agree 59.4% (19)
Neither Agree or Disagree 12.5% (4)
Disagree 6.2% (2)
Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)
Unknown (0)

14. I understand what my job responsibilities are.
Strongly Agree 43.8% (14)
Agree 50.0% (16)
Neither Agree or Disagree 6.2% (2)
Disagree (0)
Strongly Disagree (0)
Unknown (0)

15. I understand the objectives of NCBVI

Strongly Agree 43.8% (14)

Agree 46.9% (15)

Neither Agree or Disagree 6.2% (2)

Disagree 3.1% (1)

Strongly Disagree (0)

Unknown (0)

Average 4.1

16. If I have a problem I feel I can go to my supervisor for help.

Strongly Agree 40.6% (13)

Agree 37.5% (12)

Neither Agree or Disagree 12.5% (4)

Disagree 6.2% (2)

Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)

Unknown (0)

Average 3.5

17. I feel that I can go to the executive director with a problem.

Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)

Agree 40.6% (13)

Neither Agree or Disagree 15.6% (5)

Disagree 12.5% (4)

Strongly Disagree 9.4% (3)

Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 3.9

18. There is a system at NCBVI for me to make suggestions.

Strongly Agree 34.4% (11)

Agree 43.8% (14)

Neither Agree or Disagree 12.5% (4)

Disagree 6.2% (2)

Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)

Unknown (0)

Average 4.6

19. I know how to contact the NCBVI Board of Commissioners.

Strongly Agree 68.8% (22)

Agree 25.0% (8)

Neither Agree or Disagree 3.1% (1)

Disagree 3.1% (1)

Strongly Disagree (0)

Unknown (0)

Average 4.2

20. I understand the role of the Board of Commissioners.

Strongly Agree 34.4% (11)
Agree 53.1% (17)
Neither Agree or Disagree 12.5% (4)
Disagree (0)
Strongly Disagree (0)
Unknown (0)

Average 4.4

21. The executive director demonstrates equal opportunity for the Blind.

Strongly Agree 46.9% (15)
Agree 40.6% (13)
Neither Agree or Disagree 6.2% (2)
Disagree 3.1% (1)
Strongly Disagree (0)
Unknown (0)

Average 3.8

22. The executive director sets the right goals for NCBVI.

Strongly Agree 21.9% (7)
Agree 43.8% (14)
Neither Agree or Disagree 18.8% (6)
Disagree 9.4% (3)
Strongly Disagree (0)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 3.7

23. The executive director sets the right priorities for NCBVI.

Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)
Agree 43.8% (14)
Neither Agree or Disagree 15.6% (5)
Disagree 9.4% (3)
Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)
Unknown 9.4% (3)

Average 3.7

24. The executive director is a good manager.

Strongly Agree 25.0% (8)
Agree 34.4% (11)
Neither Agree or Disagree 28.1% (9)
Disagree 3.1% (1)
Strongly Disagree 9.4% (3)
Unknown (0)

Average 4.2

25. The executive director is a hard worker.

Strongly Agree 43.8% (14)
Agree 37.5% (12)
Neither Agree or Disagree 9.4% (3)
Disagree 3.1% (1)
Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)
Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 3.7

26. The executive director seeks input from the staff.

Strongly Agree 25.0% (8)
Agree 37.5% (12)
Neither Agree or Disagree 18.8% (6)
Disagree 9.4% (3)
Strongly Disagree 6.2% (2)
Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 3.6

27. The executive director is fair.

Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)
Agree 43.8% (14)
Neither Agree or Disagree 25.0% (8)
Disagree 6.2% (2)
Strongly Disagree 6.2% (2)
Unknown (0)

Average 4.0

28. If there is a dispute with the Public, I trust the executive director to listen to all sides and make a reasoned decision.

Strongly Agree 31.2% (10)
Agree 46.9% (15)
Neither Agree or Disagree 9.4% (3)
Disagree 3.1% (1)
Strongly Disagree 6.2% (2)
Unknown 3.1% (1)

Average 3.5

29. Promotions at NCBVI are based on qualifications.

Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)
Agree 31.2% (10)
Neither Agree or Disagree 28.1% (9)
Disagree 6.2% (2)
Strongly Disagree 9.4% (3)
Unknown 6.2% (2)

Average 3.4

30. I think that NCBVI is run efficiently.

Strongly Agree 18.8% (6)
Agree 31.2% (10)
Neither Agree or Disagree 21.9% (7)
Disagree 18.8% (6)
Strongly Disagree 6.2% (2)
Unknown 3.1% (1)

31. Please provide any additional comments regarding employee satisfaction.
I can go to my supervisor with questions or concerns. I am not afraid to ask for assistance. My supervisor supports the needs of staff and clients and is always willing to speak to upper management.

The business office is processing bills more quickly. Thanks!

Work groups made up of field/center staff that will plan programs independently of supervisors. The work group could check with management/administration to make sure agency rules and budget concerns are being followed. This would allow staff to feel that their ideas are valued, empowering them. Currently staff feels that it doesn't matter if they participate on committees because the supervisors will make all the decisions anyway. This may or may not be true, but it is the perception when staff does not see any changes they want.

Appreciation of a learning environment.

Training to do the job, but support to do the job is questionable. People care about each other on a personal level, but fairness and professional respect are lacking with management. There is little hope for change. Problems are only dealt with superficially, suppressing real problems rather than dealing with them directly.

I feel that I have to be constantly on guard, that any mistake I might make will be used against me in the future. I don't like feeling this way. I like my job. There are a lot of people doing good work. My supervisor is too focused on control. Although it was addressed in the past, I see the behavior returning.

I enjoy coming to work nearly 100% of the time. I attribute that to the energy the Executive Director has put into creating a positive work atmosphere.

I enjoy my job. I look forward to coming to work each day.

I have the training and skills to do my job, but the support to do my job is lacking. This has occurred during the past year.

There is a belief that supervisors/administration is always correct. Individual ideas, concerns and strengths won't affect what decisions are made. When there is a difference of opinion between management and a counselor, the management is always correct.

It is unknown whether or not the Executive Director has goals or priorities for NCBVI.

Morale, especially in Lincoln, is at an all-time low. It's sad.

NCBVI used to be about helping blind people. Currently it's about numbers. Center and field staff is treated differently. There is no consistency in how staff issues are dealt with. Bullying and micromanaging by supervisors is encouraged or overlooked.

I do not feel that I can bring up something that is bothering me without it being held against me. The agency does a great job with clients. It would be great if staff could be treated with the same dignity.

At times the Executive Director has difficulty concentrating on all of her responsibilities. This can cause me difficulty in doing my job.

I have a sense of being a part of something important through my work at NCBVI. I get a lot of personal satisfaction through the work that I do.

32. NCBVI is on the right track.

Strongly Agree 12.5% (4)

Agree 46.9% (15)

Neither Agree or Disagree 25.0% (8)

Disagree 9.4% (3)

Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)

Unknown 3.1% (1)

33. NCBVI has a good budget process.

Strongly Agree 15.6% (5)

Agree 40.6% (13)

Neither Agree or Disagree 18.8% (6)

Disagree 6.2% (2)

Strongly Disagree 3.1% (1)

Unknown 15.6% (5)

34. If you could change one thing about NCBVI, what would it be?

A greater level of consistency. There is improvement, but more needs to be done.

Increased pay.

Greater accountability for client action or inaction.

More effective communication.

A desire to understand why decisions are made. This could not happen because of laws. Often staff has only one side of a story. Frequently staff reacts to the incomplete information, making assumptions and spreading falsehoods. Staff gossip amongst themselves, perpetuating misinformation. As a result morale suffers. I wish that staff would understand that decisions are made with the best interest of NCBVI and clients in mind.

Improvement of communication and cooperation between departments.

Increased pay.

Less travel. I realize this is unrealistic, but it would be my wish.

Empowerment of individual staff members. Most of the staff is well trained and professional. The staff could benefit from opportunities to develop leadership self-sufficiency skills.

A greater number of work teams that mix staff from different departments and districts.

The payment procedures cause delays. Six months to get paid is too long. If we want to continue to work with community members and clients, this needs to be changed. I do not know what causes the delays in payment, but I get inquiries from clients and providers many months after submission for payment has been made, with no updates or receipt of payment.

Better cooperation among supervisors.

Employees with concerns about other staff should be able to talk to their supervisor or administration without fear of repercussions. Problems need to be dealt with, instead of being ignored.

Everything takes too long in the accounting department. Perhaps HR and accounting need to be separated or we need to hire an additional person. NCBVI is a great place to work. I wish my department would have monthly meetings. The Lincoln District has meetings where they discuss current blindness issues, bringing them closer together as a team. I feel my department is missing out on this opportunity.

The culture of the management needs to be changed. I'm not sure what to suggest, but I do feel it needs to change.

Reevaluation of job descriptions.

A return to focusing on the mission statement.

During work group assignments, the counselor's opinions and ideas be given equal value to those of supervisors.

35. I believe the feedback I provided today is valued and appreciated.

Yes 81.2% (26)

No 15.6% (5)

Commissioner Walla noted that in hearing the questions and reflecting, he does not like the survey. For example, what does it mean to be a hard worker? A lot of people are hard workers, but they are unorganized. However, from looking at the scores it appears that things are okay.

Commissioner Oltman noted that she would assume that the score of a 5 is perfect. A score above 3, which is satisfactory, is good. The director scored above 3 in all areas. In her opinion, there is not a human being alive who is perfect. What went into the survey was the fact that they were looking for a tool, not only to help the commission evaluate the director, but since the staff is at the office everyday they have direct contact with the administration and with each other. Therefore, the staff is more likely than the commissioners to be aware of what goes on every day. The commission gets many emails from the director for items they need to review, but they do not know the day by day activity.

Commissioner Hansen noted that the survey is not only used as a tool to help with the executive director's evaluation, but it is also used as a general climate survey for the staff at the commission.

Chairperson Johnson noted that there were one or two comments about a grievance filed by a past Apartment Resource counselor. She checked into the validity of this statement and found that no such grievances have been filed. Chairperson Johnson noted that she hopes this is a simple misunderstanding and not the staff choosing to spread inaccurate information. She feels this is one behavior contributing to the difficulties between staff and management. The rampant gossip is very hurtful. It needs to stop.

Vice Chairperson Jirak reported that he contacted the State Auditor's office regarding the comment about completing NCSAB duties on State of Nebraska work time. Vice Chairperson Jirak noted that he was informed that if NCSAB affects blindness or benefits those who are blind then the work may be performed on State work time. He was also informed that the Board must authorize the executive director being the treasurer for NCSAB in order to formalize how it is handled.

Director Van Zandt noted that she also has a position on that National Blind Professionals Certification Board and Community Advocates, Inc. Director Van Zandt had served on the Board of Trustees for the American Foundation for the Blind, but she did resign from that position.

Vice Chairperson Jirak moved to approve Executive Director Van Zandt to seek an additional term as Treasurer of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). This is to be approved on a year by year basis. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve Executive Director Van Zandt participation in the National Blind Professionals Certification Board for the current term. This is to be approved on a year by year basis. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion except Commissioner Walla who abstained.

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve Executive Director Van Zandt participation on the Board of Community Advocates, Inc. for the current term. This is to be approved on a year by year basis. Commissioner Oltman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners were in favor of the motion.

Chairperson Johnson noted that she followed up on the staff comment that Director Van Zandt is out of the office a lot of the time and works from home. Chairperson Johnson reported that she found no abuse.

Chairperson Johnson reported that there were a lot of other comments which led to a theme of communication being an issue. Chairperson Johnson stated that this issue will be discussed later. Chairperson Johnson noted that there are also issues of there being a division between administration and the direct service employees. Chairperson Johnson asked Director Van Zandt for her thoughts on this. Director Van Zandt noted that communication is crucial. We already have in place some ideas for the Central office, namely herself, the two deputy directors of field services, the business manager and the program manager of technology. Administration needs to try to communicate effectively with all the staff all the time. The field supervisors carry caseloads as well as the people they work with. However, there could still be a breakdown in communication. We are working to improve communication at all levels and in both directions. It appears that there is a communication gap between field staff and center staff and we really need to work at communicating more effectively. We can certainly get better about communication and it does need attention. Communication is something that everyone must own and participate in.

Chairperson Johnson noted that there was a comment about having work teams across districts that could work on programs and projects independent of the supervisor. Chairperson Johnson asked Director Van Zandt about her thoughts on that approach. Director Van Zandt stated that she thought that NCBVI did this. There is not always a supervisor involved. When PI, Winnerfest and the Employment Conference were planned, we generally always do a mix of staff from different offices. During this past year or so a staff person has been the

lead of programs and Deputy Director Deaton has been a member of the planning team. Director Van Zandt noted that she does agree with the suggestion and does feel that it is not always necessary to have a supervisor lead the teams. To her knowledge, this suggestion is being done. Director Van Zandt noted that she will look into the specifics.

Commissioner Hansen moved to retain Dr. Pearl Van Zandt as the Executive Director of the Commission for another year. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

The commissioners inquired about the raise percentage for staff this year. Director Van Zandt noted that Rules covered employees will get a 2.25% raise effective July 1, 2013.

Commissioner Hansen moved to give the Executive Director a 2.25% raise effective July 1, 2013. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

It was noted that Chairperson Johnson needs to communicate to the Governor via State Personnel that the NCBVI Executive Director was retained.

Executive Director Time Sheet Certification Submission

Commissioner Oltman moved to continue with the current method being used for the Director to submit her Personnel Activity Report to the Board. The Director submits her Personnel Activity Report via email to the entire Board for their review and information. It is an automatic approval unless a question or concern is raised by a Commission Board member.

Commissioner Walla seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

Discuss & Act on the Approval of Employee in-state and out-of-state Travel

Director Van Zandt noted that State law requires all travel of staff of state agencies to be pre-approved. This includes travel in state and out state. Currently for out of state travel all staff must complete a form that says where they are going, why they are going there, the cost, how it will be funded, etc. and this must be pre-approved by their immediate supervisor and by the executive director. This is done by all staff for out of state travel.

Supervisors manage in state travel by getting itineraries from staff and reviewing them on an on-going basis. However, staff is not required to check in with their supervisor every morning to get an okay for in state travel as this would not be manageable. Discussion was held with Administrative Services to determine how the agency could comply with the law regarding in state travel. Administrative Services recommended that each year the Board of

Commissioners would have a motion to pre-approve travel that is related to the purpose of the staff person's position. Business Manager Bill Brown put together a proposed motion for the Board to approve.

Commissioner Hansen moved:

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired approves all employee in-state business travel and/or out of state business travel within 60 miles of the border of Nebraska in any adjoining state, which relates directly to the provision of services to a client, i.e. employer visit, medical appointment, service referral, employment interview, etc. All other out of state business travel is approved if granted approval by the Executive Director of the agency. This motion is in effect until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners after April 1, 2014.

Commissioner Jirak seconded.

A roll call vote and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Public Comment

Carlos Serván – Carlos asked for clarification on the point about staff belonging to outside organizations. Staff needs to seek approval only when they will use work time or work resources to conduct the organizations duties.

Connie Daly – Connie stated that she really respects our Executive Director and all of the people that we work with. She does not feel that it is appropriate for the Director's evaluation to be conducted publicly. Connie noted that she does not know if the commissioners can effectively evaluate the Director, except for on the services NCBVI provides, since they do not work with her on a daily basis.

Chairperson Johnson explained why the Executive Director Evaluation is conducted in a public meeting. When NCBVI first became a Commission, the evaluation of the Executive Director was not held during a Public meeting, but later they were informed that it was to be held in a Public meeting. The change was made at this time. Director Van Zandt added that we had been informed this is required by the Public Meeting law.

Chairperson Johnson noted that she recently talked to Andy Russell in AS-State Personnel and he informed her that while the evaluation of the executive director needs to be held during a public meeting, the evaluation itself should be held in an executive session. Changes were not made for this year because of the short notice and for the sake of continuity. The commissioners will be looking at changing the evaluation procedure for 2014.

Connie Daly – Connie stated that she is really glad that the commissioners are looking at the effectiveness of the survey as well because a lot of the comments that the commissioners have made today makes her believe that they have misinterpreted some of the survey results.

Jeff Altman - Jeff noted that he is with the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska. Jeff stated that he recognizes that the NCBVI is going through some difficult times right now and NFB-N wishes to offer their support and offers to be a resource to NCBVI as needed. NFB-N believes that the NCBVI is providing high quality services, yet there are things that could be improved upon. NFB-N believes very strongly in what the agency is doing and they are in a supportive position with the agency for that. With regard to the survey instrument, perhaps the issue is not so much a matter of what is being asked, but what is being looked at. Jeff stated that the commissioners should be examining the product of the Director's work that the Director herself. The NFB-N is concerned that the relationships between administration and employees leads to high quality services coming to the consumers.

Alex Castillo – Alex stated that he feels it is important to evaluate the philosophy and product of the agency. Alex stated that Director Van Zandt happens to be a good director, but there are occasions and places where that may not be true. Alex stated that he feels that both need to be looked at. Alex stated that it is important for him as a consumer to see where the agency is going because this determines the type of services he receives. Alex stated that you will never have a terrible director with an awesome agency. The executive director is what really guides the services of the agency. Alex noted that from working at NCBVI he does know that Pearl does a very good job at what she does.

Tony Olivero – Tony noted that he had one observation as the commissioners were going through the survey results. There was not a lot of discussion about how the survey results compared to previous results. He encouraged the commissioners to consider how they will be able to analyze trends in future years in order that they will be able to measure if the agency is improving.

Vice Chairperson Jirak noted that Jeff Altman had made a comment about NFB being there as a resource for the Commission. Vice Chairperson Jirak stated that he appreciates this. Vice Chairperson Jirak noted for the record that if there is a need, the ACB will also be willing to be resource.

Break – A break was taken at 10:50 a.m. The meeting resumed at 11:05 a.m.

Unfinished Business

Commissioners Report (formerly Report from the Chair)

Chairperson Johnson reported that she attended all three days of the NCBVI State Staff meeting. There were many good topics and good speakers. She also attended the ACB-N Convention in Fremont. Chairperson Johnson noted that she has also been busy responding to emails and phone calls that spurred from the State Staff meeting and the staff survey. Chairperson Johnson reported

that she will attend the Employment Workshop in June, the NCSAB Fall Conference in November and the NFB-N convention this Fall.

Vice Chairperson Jim Jirak reported that he attended the ACB-N Convention. He also noted that he will be involved in the upcoming Employment Conference which will take place in Lincoln.

Commissioner Hansen reported that he attended day 2 and day 3 of the State Staff meeting. He has also been working on follow-ups from the staff survey.

Commissioner Oltman reported that she attended the first afternoon of the State Staff meeting. The State Rehab Council did not have a conference call this quarter. Director Van Zandt noted that these calls have been discontinued.

Commissioner Walla thanked Director Van Zandt for the Commission sympathy card he received for the passing of his mother. Commissioner Walla added that he plans to become more involved in NCBVI events in the upcoming months.

Report from the Executive Director

Director Van Zandt verbally gave highlights of her report and she thanked the Commissioners for their time. The entire report of the Executive Director is pasted here:

Today we welcome Scott Pavelka and Ashley Pinkelman who joined our staff since the past meeting. Scott will be a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the North Platte District. Ashley is our new Vocational Rehabilitation Tech in Omaha. We do also have Joyce Thompson, through the State 'temp' agency (SOS), in Lincoln at the switchboard and as support for Center needs. Joyce works part time, but on an ongoing basis. We are beginning a condensed training to give her basics of Braille, Cane Travel, etc. In Omaha, we have also had Scott Corder, on a temporary basis, to fill in after Nicole left and while Ashley has been in training.

The Annual State Plan for Voc Rehab and Supported Employment Services is due to RSA by July 1, 2013. The draft is complete, except for some updated figures and the goals that will be established after obtaining those updates. We welcome ideas from the Board, consumers and staff throughout the year. The plan is submitted every year, so we can consider ideas even after a plan is submitted.

I also worked with the general voc rehab agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council to finalize a draft State Plan for Independent Living.

The In-Service Training Grant Report was due April 30th and was completed on time. It included information about Federal Fiscal Year 2012 and the grant activities and expenditures thus far in Federal Fiscal Year 2013.

Another quarterly update to the RSA Monitoring Review Corrective Action Plan was completed and submitted on April 30th. Most items have been fully resolved, though some parts of the financial items are dependent upon action from the U.S. Department of Education/Indirect Cost Group, and Rehab Services Administration. We have submitted what we can do and we have changed practice and procedures to be consistent with what we expect to be approved. We did receive confirmation from RSA that the submission was complete. They acknowledged that some items are still marked "Partially Resolved" in the system, which have been completed. There is a time lag due to the RSA staff schedules, which keeps these showing as not resolved. It is in the RSA court to make the official changes in the web-based system.

At the end of February, I went to the Scottsbluff Office. Spent time with staff and attended the Official Ribbon Cutting and Open House for our new location in the new Scottsbluff State Office Building.

Our Budget Hearing was March 7th. The State Appropriations Committee had good questions and showed interest in the work that we do. The committee has finalized their budget bill. The amount of state funds for our agency is more than we had requested, partially to cover the labor contract negotiated raises for state employees (2.25% July 1, 2013 and July 1, 2014).

I've worked with Wes, Bill, State officials on aspects related to accessibility problems of various state systems applications. Wes has been working diligently to remedy the problems for the long term.

The NCBVI Annual State Staff Meeting was held April 9 – 11 in Lincoln.

I met with Representatives from Sheldon Art Gallery about a project called Sheldon Market Place of Community Values. Deanna Jesse is heading this project to highlight blindness and the agency services in a creative way, working with an artist assigned to us by Sheldon. The work has started already; the event is in mid-June in Lincoln.

Last week at the NCSAB conference, Carlos and I met with the researchers who are conducting our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The study is in process. We were able to fine tune some of the details involved. We also heard ideas from other state agencies for the blind, especially about transition services and business enterprise/Randolph-Sheppard program.

I continue to attend meetings with Center, Field offices, our Administrative Team, NBE Vendors Committee, State agency directors, Lincoln/Lancaster Multicultural

Advisory Committee, Nebraska Department of Education Transition Advisory Council. I met with Friends of the Commission twice since the last meeting – they do not have any projects, but do want to attend agency events when possible. I spoke at and attended the ACB-N State Convention. I also meet with the general agency's Director about issues of mutual interest and have met with the Director of Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to work out details of the Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution program.

Field Services

Thus far in Federal Fiscal Year 2013 (October 1, 2012 through April 30, 2013), we served 703 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Seventeen (17) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Nineteen (19) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, unable to locate, disability too severe to benefit from VR, and other).

In the Independent Living (IL) track, from October 1, 2012 through April 30, 2013, we have served 477 clients in all statuses. One hundred seventy two (172) were closed successfully; twenty two (22) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons).

Nebraska Center for the Blind

Total Full-time Clients Served between 1996 through April, 2013: 212

Competitive Employment: 123

Homemakers: 23

Students: 44

Results:

Of the clients that finished training and schooling;

87 percent are employed (competitive employment and homemaker)

73 percent of the clients finished training and schooling are competitively employed

13 percent are homemakers

21 percent are students from the total number

10 percent are not working

Center Activities this quarter included Laser tag, Ice hockey, Easter eggs decorating, Center Banquet, Musical, ACB state convention, Delta Gamma dinner, Fishing activity, Commission meeting, Tour of the National Monument.

We have continued the training of Bryan Nursing School students. The project started last August and so far we trained 66 students, the first semester 30, and this semester 36, and we will train about 50 next semester. We are changing the way to do it, from one or two coming over and spending time in the classes. This next semester, we will work with a group of students for a full day. This will allow for less interruption in classes and allow more focused time of training. It still

give nursing students the basics and the interaction with Center clients, which has been very good. To cover the nurses and our own students, we will bring in consumers who we use many times to cover classes when staff are on vacation or away for other reasons.

North Platte District – Sarah Stewart

Once again, I can't believe it's already time for another quarterly meeting! The North Platte District had a busy and productive spring quarter. Carlos Servan, Bob Deaton, Wes Majerus and I conducted our Annual District Case reviews on February 11th and 12th. We were very happy to welcome Cristal Grado back from maternity leave on March 4th.

In early March, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Support Staff in the North Platte District received additional training in E-force from Dottie Wilmott, our resident E-force expert. The vocational rehabilitation documentation in E-force is relatively new to some staff in our district and a refresher for others but we all found the training very helpful to more effectively using the system.

We had another great Winnerfest program on March 7-9th. Jamie Forbis worked the program from our district this time. It was a largest group of kids in a while, 20 total, which is very exciting. Four participants from our district were able to attend. Thanks to all who worked the program, it sounds like everyone had a fun time and we hope to have many kids return in the fall.

Deanna Jesse, Program Specialist for the Older Blind coordinated the Blind Artist's Workshop which was held on March 19th and 20th in Kearney. She invited blind artist John Bramblitt to present a 6 hour workshop to clients and staff on the 19th and a 2 hour workshop to art teachers and art professionals on the 20th. There were 36 attendees total including 13 clients, 9 staff, 2 art teachers and members of Why Arts, Sheldon Museum of Art and the Nebraska Arts Council.

Deanna was able to receive assistance fund the workshop through a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council, paint from various donors, and free classroom space from University of Nebraska Kearney. Mr. Bramblitt was a guest on the local NTV Good Life news program and the event was covered in the Kearney Hub and Omaha World Herald. The event and publicity regarding it was a great promotion not only of our services but of the array of possibilities and abilities of blind individuals.

Of course, staff also attended the State Staff Meetings held April 9-11th at the Holiday Inn in Downtown Lincoln. We had a full schedule of training each day and as always, we enjoyed spending time with our colleagues statewide. Although the weather was unseasonably treacherous for April, all staff made it the distance to and from the meetings without incident for which we are grateful. On April 23rd and 24th, Jan Brandt and Jamie Forbis attended the Mac Academy

training in Lincoln and they will be sharing their new technology knowledge with the rest of the district.

We had 1 successful job retention closure for a client as a Packaging and Filling Machine Operator.

We are planning another excited quarter for May, June, and July. We are looking forward to Scott Pavelka, North Platte VR Counselor joining our team in the field in May. For the first time in a while we will be fully staffed and able to provide even better services to our clients.

Omaha District Update

We did partner with Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide training for Interpreters and Support Service Providers on Deaf Blindness. This was held on April 12th and 13th. Thanks to Cheryl, Carol, Elaine, Nancy, Larry, Bob and Conchita as well as staff at Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It was remarkable and we have had wonderful feedback from the evaluations.

TABS took part in an beep baseball and beep kickball activity hosted by The Ultimate Baseball Academy and sponsored by NAPVI. The students long with their parents had a wonderful time at this event. This too was held on April 13th. There was an excellent article written in the Omaha World Herald and TV coverage. Kudos to Kathy and Kelly on coordinating this exciting activity.

We held a College Workshop for students that will be making that transition from high school to college on February 23rd. We had representatives from Creighton, Metro Community College. We gave out resources for scholarships, copy of the letter for academic support from NCBVI and other valuable resources. We built on materials we used a couple of years ago that Kelly, Chad and Carol had compiled. Thanks to Monica, Carol and Chad for planning and working this event.

We have had Kelly and Cheryl and several consumers participate in the Blind Artist Training in Kearney on March 19th.

The National Braille Certification Exam will be held here in Omaha on May 3rd.

We have been working with the Employment Committee to plan the next Employment Conference.

We have been working with National Career Readiness Certification Program. This is a certification that about 40 states have employed to certify that their clients are job ready. We have found that though this could be a valuable tool, it is not accessible. Wes has been support of us and in communication with ACT about the accessibility concerns.

We had staff and clients attend the spring Winnerfest program. It was a full agenda and students gained a great deal from participating in training. I thought the creativity of the planning committee was exceptional.

Chad participated in the latest training for Project Search. The newest project is with OPS and Embassy Suites. The training occurred on March 28th and 29th at the downtown Embassy Suites.

Nicole Schopen who had been with us for about 6 years left us on February 15th for an exciting opportunity with RFD TV. She is missed. We have Scott Corder with SOS to fill in until our new staff person has been hired and completed training.

We did hire Ashley Pinkelman, who started her training in the Center on April 8th. She will be starting in the Omaha office on May 13th.

We had a couple of staff and clients attend the ACBN convention in Fremont.

We have had a client that has been hired as a part time secretary for NCDHH. We have a person hired as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. A client hired as courtesy clerk at Hy Vee, Production Worker, Overnight Stocker at Walmart, Working to maintain position as TPA Manager at Zurich Insurance. Several people that are in the second interview stage. Clients are busy interviewing and this is great! We continue to work with Human Resources of the Midland, The Chamber, we are a part of networking events and placement committees. We are working at being more visible in the community.

We are working with Manpower on their Project Ability. They recognize the shortage of talent and realize the importance of partnering with us, VR and Easter Seals.

We have had clients move out of state to Texas and Arizona.

Lincoln District – Connie Daly

We finished three GATE sessions in our newly remodeled kitchen and dining room. We were able to accommodate 8 participants. Seven people graduated from the program and they are considering the full center training program. The last person will graduate at the next session.

The Norfolk office has finished remodeling their office. Dave Robinson now has an office rather than working out of their kitchen.

We had a kids group in Lincoln and they learned about shopping. They purchased some items for our kitchen and worked on cane travel. The next meeting we will have a fire safety demonstration.

We are working with the Employment committee to have another workshop in Lincoln for blind job seekers. We will have a ribbon cutting as a part of that and invite a number of businesses to participate. We will have training from the Referral Institute on recognizing behavioral styles and adjusting your style for individuals that you are networking with. The training will be presented to our clients along with other business professionals.

We had clients find employment at Hy-vee, Kawasaki, Community Mental Health, Conroy's Bakery. We assisted clients with maintaining employment at Apogee.

Business Office - Bill Brown

Federal Reporting

Cash Flow Forecast for Agency Funds

Program Income Distribution

Information Gathering on Sequester Impact

Upgrade of Services, Data, Building, Equipment, Training with Program Income and Accounting thereof

Cost Allocation Accounting and fine tuning.

Kathy Stephens – Administrative Assistant

Completed W: Drive Cleanup project with assistance from Wes, Bill and Vicki.

Attended a Lunch and Learn event at the Asian Community Center regarding the Sudan and Southern Sudan culture.

Working on getting adjustments completed for fixed assets. Began scanning some fixed assets and will continue working on this project.

Attended a Center Activity at the Amazing Pizza Machine in Omaha.

Attended State Staff Meeting.

Completed the 2013 Food Bank Drive.

Deputy Directors

Carlos:

Scott Pavelka, VR counselor from NP, will start working on the field next week.

The Employment Committee is working on the Employment conference and technology expo which will take place on June 5, 6, and 7. The theme this year will be self-employment and Kevan Worley will be the key-note speaker.

NBE:

New contract with DOR we need to up-grade the vending machines to be in compliance with the ADA. We will get all of those machines before the end of the federal fiscal year.

New contract with Joint Forces is ready and the vendor should start at anytime. The two vendors in Omaha started to run the 7 new Post Office small locations added to their management.

I am attending BLAST from May 20-23.

Vendors Committee meeting is in two weeks and they will have elections.

Bob:

February 25-28 "Partners Building Bridges to a Diverse and Successful Future" conference on deaf and deaf-blindness in Baltimore

March 19 Blind Artist Workshop in Kearney

March 29 "Lunch and Learn" event with focus on the culture of southern Sudan

April 9-11 state staff meeting in Lincoln

April 12-13 ssp (support service provider) workshop in Omaha

April 19-21 ACBN state convention in Fremont

Wes Majerus Technology Program manager

Training

I participated in two training events in the last quarter. The first was on March 27 and 28 in Omaha, NE. It was entitled "Managing Multiple Locations" and focused on strategies for managing team members who are not working in the same location. It was an informative training, and did give me some pointers and strategies for managing my team. The second training was April 23 and 24. My team organized the Mac Academy training from Triumph Technologies of Minneapolis, MN. Earle Harrison, the Company President, gave us a two-day training on the basics of using the Macintosh computer.

Accessibility

Work continues on the Performance Appraisal System. Dr. Van Zandt, Bill Brown, and I met with officials from AS State Personnel in mid-February. The State seems committed to making the system accessible. Michael Floyd, AS Personnel's accessibility analyst, and I worked to identify problems with the system and brought them to the attention of Cornerstone OnDemand, the software vendor. Cornerstone OnDemand officials are tentatively scheduled to come to Lincoln on May 9 to discuss these issues and possible resolutions.

I also serve on the Workday Accessibility Council. AS State Personnel invited Michael Floyd and me to serve on the council to represent the State of Nebraska. We have had two meetings to discuss global accessibility of Workday (the system the State uses for Open Enrollment and HR tasks). Workday's Product Accessibility Manager has worked with the State one-on-one to address issues with the specific pieces of Workday. This has included setting up test systems for us to work with the Open Enrollment task as well as fixing issues we have encountered in signing onto the Workday system. They have been receptive to suggestions that we have made, and have worked toward fixing some of the bugs we have encountered. It is my hope that if the State uses other portions of

workday, this partnership can be leveraged to ensure that those parts are accessible when the State goes live with them.

I have also been working with Edge (Formerly EnterpriseOne/NIS). When the software was upgraded a couple years back, some of the Accessibility functionality was modified. The State and Oracle are aware of these issues and are working to remediate them as best they can. The State has also implemented a customized way of viewing paystubs in HTML format and printing them to Excel. Though these functions have been available since NIS's inception, we are working to streamline those processes. We have made the HTML paystub viewing form more accessible with table markup and are making it easier to print CSV files by rearranging menu options. These fixes were recently pushed to production, and I will be testing the final versions in the coming days and getting the information about their existence out to the staff.

General Operations

I continue my work supporting staff technology concerns. I assisted Bill Brown in finding the equipment necessary for an Audio/Video system to be installed in early May. I am also working to replace our Licensing server for access technology products such as Duxbury, ZoomText, and JAWS for Windows. We have also purchased some new equipment for District Offices such as iPads, a new embosser for the Lincoln District, and Mac Book Pro units for the Kearney and Omaha offices.

The Technology team will also have a presence at the Employment Conference the Commission is hosting June 5, 6, and 7. We will provide technology demos during the Conference room ribbon cutting on June 6. There will also be a Technology Expo the morning of June 7, which will provide hands-on technology demos and an opportunity for clients or interested employers to meet with a technology specialist one-on-one to explore a specific piece of technology. I have worked extensively this quarter to plan these elements of the conference with my team and the Employment Committee.

Dave Robinson, Personnel

1. Completed updating everyone's Workday file with the physical location of their workplace, so everyone would be able to receive flash emergency e-mails from the State Patrol, in the event something that they would need to be aware of in their workplace was occurring.
2. Nicole Schopen resigned her position of Voc. Rehab. Tech. in Omaha, effective February 15, 2013.
3. Alex Castillo resigned his position as Apartment Resource Counselor, effective March 22, 2013. There are no immediate plans to re-open the position. In the meantime, the duties are being assumed by Laurie Jacobsen through S.O.S.

4. Ashley Pinkelman started with the agency on April 1, 2013. She'll be in Center training for six weeks and will then assume the role vacated by Nicole.
5. Attended the annual Open Enrollment meeting on April 30, 2013. Open enrollment for the plan year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 will be May 14-28 2013.

There were no big changes to benefits for the upcoming plan year.

There were increases in premiums for three out of the four health plans, of 2, 4 and five percent.

The health plans will also start recognizing that specialists generally practice a higher level of medicine and should be compensated a little more, so a separate co-pay for specialists will be implemented. It will be \$10.00 more than the co-pay for an office visit to a family Doctor.
End of Executive Director's Report.

The commissioners discussed the low client attendance at the Center. The Center currently has five clients and one will be leaving next week. Commissioner Hansen noted that it is concerning that these numbers are so low. If the Center is not being used as a resource we may lose it. Commissioner Hansen suggested working with other states. Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI has informed other states of our Center services. NCBVI has contracted with other states in the past to send clients to the Center. NCBVI's mission is to serve Nebraskans, but if the Center has room we could still serve other states. Director Van Zandt noted that the NCBVI is committed to work on this.

Commissioner Walla asked if it was possible that the numbers for individuals who need Center services is just low at this time. Perhaps there are more seniors who need services. Director Van Zandt stated that if you look at the incidence of blindness in the population, there is no question that there are far more senior blind than blind individuals in the working age. At the same time, many older people continue to work much longer than in the past. Director Van Zandt noted that the major funding of the agency is from the Rehab Act and the vocational rehabilitation in jobs. For example, even though there is a need for transportation, the funding is not for transportation. There may be a need for senior blind to receive training, but it is set up in federal law as to what NCBVI's funding must go to. This is why we struggle with the amount of time staff can spend on the senior blind and independent living programs. It is also a reality these days that more and more blind individuals have multiple disabilities. This is true across the board; the NCBVI serves many individuals in both field services and in the Center with multiple disabilities.

Public Comment

Bob Deaton – Bob stated that he wanted to talk about the issue of not holding a Senior Blind Conference this year. Bob stated that in regard to cost allocation, RSA is telling NCBVI that we have to do less with certain populations. If 8 percent of the budget is for older blind services and staff is spending 16 percent of their time serving older blind, RSA is saying we cannot do this anymore. More time is to be spent on Basic Support. Bob Deaton noted that this is a real challenge and it does affect his morale. RSA's position is that it is all about employment. Director Van Zandt noted that the reality is that the President and Congress sets up the national budget. Included in this are grants for Vocational Rehabilitation (Basic Support) that is to be used to put people to work, regardless of their age. This is 80 plus percent of our budget. There is a much smaller budget that is for older blind and independent living (part B – under age 55). NCBVI and VR agencies around the country cannot meet all the needs with the grants we have. States are also being told that we must spend all Social Security Reimbursement (program income) dollars before we can draw down money from the federal grant.

Laurie Jacobsen – Lori asked what NCBVI does to add to the public awareness of what the Center and the Commission does.

Director Van Zandt noted that she feels that some of the events held throughout communities will help with this. Chairperson Johnson stated that it is an ongoing effort. The mission of the Commission is to help people get jobs.

Commissioner Hansen noted that there are several things that NCBVI does to market its services. The agency has done a public service announcement, sent out information to eye doctors and has given them information to hand out to patients. Staff also attends conferences across the state and staff informational booths about the agency. The absolute best resource the NCBVI is the people who use or have used our services.

Commissioner Walla asked if a blind senior could go to Blind, Inc. or the Louisiana Center for the Blind, who are private entities, for training. Commissioner Hansen stated they could, but they would need to pay for it. Commissioner Walla stated in that case he feels NCBVI should privatize. This statement created quite a bit of controversy.

Jeff Altman – Jeff stated that the Center has been approved by the National Blind Certification Board, which also is the organization which approves the NFB Centers. The program that is run in Nebraska is a very good program and the problem with privatization is that you have to be in a constant state of fund raising. It also becomes much more expensive, as much as \$50,000 per month, per person.

Lunch – A lunch break was taken at 12:10 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 12:40 p.m.

Alex Castillo – Alex stated that he wanted to address the comment about privatizing and how it works. If a blind individual who is 70 years of age wants to go to a privatized Center, they can but they will need to get the funding and you must be able to convince your counselor that the training would benefit you at your age.

Alex noted that the NCBVI Training Center is good. He was there for a year and it is an environment where the instructors and clients get synergy. Sometimes blind students fail their classes in college because they do not have the proper training. This costs the agency money. While you cannot force someone to attend Center training, there should be a real effort to target those clients who are entering college.

Commissioner Hansen asked if someone is not ready to go to the Center, but does not have the necessary skills to go to college, are they ready for other services that we may be providing. Will the client succeed in college if they do not have the proper training?

Alex Castillo – Alex stated that in his opinion that if clients do not have the training that is provided at the Training Center and they go to college they will not be as successful, yet they may be able to struggle through it. There may be those who even do very well. At some point they will be lacking. If there is a student who has a 4.0 in high school and they have very poor mobility skills, but they are very intelligent, they will probably succeed. However, if you have someone who is not doing very well in high school and they are not adjusting to their blindness and then they attend college without Center training, they will probably struggle.

Connie Daly – Connie stated that she knows that the numbers in the Center have been low and there are issues that they have been working on. Connie noted that it is very disappointing to her that one of the commissioners would state that NCBVI should privatize. Connie stated that she is losing confidence that the commissioners can support the agency in meeting its missions and goals when those types of comments are made.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she does hope that people are mindful about their statements and how others take them. It is important that the agency come together as a team. Chairperson Johnson stated that she would like to see the Commission move toward a strength based approach. The Commission needs to look at what is going wrong, but we need to stop focusing on all the negative stuff all the time. NCBVI is doing some awesome stuff and let's move forward and focus on what we are doing right.

Glennie Weiland – Glennie asked if it was more expensive for NCBVI to put on the Older Blind Conference in Kearney or when the VIPS did it. Director Van Zandt stated that she recalls that they were comparable in price. Director Van Zandt noted that the key is not the dollars, but the staff time. Bob Deaton added that the cost was comparable.

Jeff Altman – Jeff followed up on Alex's comments about Center training. Jeff noted that many times clients do not know what their blindness skill level is. When many people come out of high school they assume that college is the next step. Sometimes having a negative experience is necessary before you can go on to something positive. Jeff noted that he knows that field counselors talk to clients about the Center, but a lot of times the client will state that they do not need that. At that time the client would go to college and they would fail enough that they realized that they need Center training and skills. Jeff reported that there has been a "bumping up" of preparation and skills needed for a client to attend the Center.

Vice Chairperson Jirak thanked Alex for adding the caveat he did about blind students attending college. Commissioner Jirak stated his experience in college was not because of blindness, but because of 'a me thing.

Karen Anderson – Karen stated that she thinks it is good that the Commission evaluates issues on a case by case basis.

Chairperson Johnson stated that within the next few months she would like to explore new programs, new ideas and new ways that NCBVI can move the agency forward.

Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI will be putting on an Employment Conference in June and it will be geared towards clients and employers. The Conference is a very innovative approach and will be a dynamic three day program. Staff in the field offices is networking with businesses in a lot of different ways. The technology team is also participating in the conference. Director Van Zandt noted that she agrees that NCBVI needs to keep thinking ahead, but she does believe that staff in each unit are looking at how we can make things better.

Commissioner Hansen noted that he has a follow-up question regarding the Director's report she presented earlier. Commissioner Hansen stated that there had been an ongoing effort for the Center staff to complete a desk audit. Commissioner Hansen requested an update on this process.

Executive Director Van Zandt reported that the Center staff has been given full permission to work on completing a Personnel Description Questionnaire - PDQ. Center staff currently has a full planning day/work day per month. Director Van

Zandt stated that she has not heard from any of the staff as to if they are working on their PDQ or not. Once the PDQ is completed it will go to State Personnel.

Commissioner Hansen stated that it is his understanding that the audit will be completed for the entire Center training staff. More recently when desk audits have been conducted they have been for an individual position.

Director Van Zandt noted that if any individual staff member wants to do have a desk audit, they may complete a PDQ and have State Personnel review their position. There is nothing that prevents staff from doing this. The individual staff member must complete the PDQ.

Commissioner Hansen asked if Center has been given adequate time to complete their PDQ. Commissioner Hansen noted that he would like to see them have the opportunity to complete their PDQ in order to get the matter resolved.

Center Director Fatos Floyd reported that in a previous meeting she and Director Van Zandt made it very clear that if Center staff requests additional time to complete their PDQ it will be approved. Fatos Floyd noted that she has not received such request.

Director Van Zandt noted that other individuals in the past few years have completed a PDQ and had desk audits. These staff had not asked for additional time to work on the PDQ.

Jeff Altman stated that the Center team has been working on the PDQ but it is not yet finalized.

Connie Daly noted that there are morale issues in the Center and in the field and part of it is the Center staff PDQs because the Center staff believes that they should be paid more and at a different level than the field staff. The field staff does a lot and has a lot of responsibilities. They can't focus one area; they have to be able to do it all. This is an issue that is causing a morale problem.

Director Van Zandt noted that some staff members complete their PDQs on their own time and others complete them along with their other duties. After the PDQ is completed it goes to State Personnel. Director Van Zandt noted that all position upgrades are not approved by State Personnel. Director Van Zandt noted that the administration tries to support staff trying to advance themselves. NCBVI has supported staff completing their PDQs during work hours.

Connie Daly noted that the Center has been talking about completing their PDQs for two or three years now so they should have found time to complete them, especially given the fact that they only have four clients in the Center now.

The commissioners thanked everyone for their comments.

Budget Update

The sequestration will affect our vocational rehab and independent living grants. The supported employment and older blind grants will stay the same. There will also be a decrease in client assistance, assistive technology and Centers for Independent Living. However, with the Commission's regular grant plus NCBVI has been receiving a lot of reimbursement from social security, the agency is in good shape financially.

NCBVI's budget request went in and on April 29 the Appropriations Committee came out with their numbers, which will go to the Governor. These numbers are a little above the level of the agencies request to allow for the increase in the negotiated raises. There is also a deficit budget related to health insurance withholding that must be subtracted from the budget. The amount budgeted is a little over 1 million dollars each of the state fiscal years for the next biennium. The state has provided NCBVI enough funding in order to receive our federal amounts.

NFB Newsline® Update

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®
Jamie K. Forbis, Outreach Coordinator
May 1, 2013

NFB-Newsline® continues to grow even if the snow outside prevents the grass from doing so. The Patriot Ledger, a daily afternoon publication out of Quincy Massachusetts, was recently planted in the line-up of over 350 publications. Locally; last month a problem sprang up with the Grand Island Independent. The beginning of the article would be read correctly and then a message notifying the subscriber to pay a subscription fee would prevent the article from being read. Recently the Kearney Hub experienced the same issue and both problems are being addressed. Baltimore hopes to have the problem fixed before the dandelions fly.

Like a bouquet of spring flowers; all three months stats from the past quarter will be written together. This gives a different view of how the stats change from month to month. It also weeds out the extra space and time it takes to compare all the numbers.

February, March and April each showed an increase of subscribers to NFB-Newsline®. Ten subscribers were added in both February and April with 6 in March. This brings the total number of current subscribers to 1,646. Exactly one year ago Nebraska NFB-Newsline® had 1,546 subscribers, so the number of subscribers has blossomed by 100 over the past year!

In February 1,058 calls were made to NFB-Newsline®, in March 1,256 and in April 1,124. During these calls 15,012 minutes during February, 17,197 minutes during March and 15,494 minutes during April were spent reading content. The average call lasted 14.49 minutes in February, 13.69 minutes in March and 13.78 minutes in April. 47.12% of those calls in February were made through the local number with 49.15% in March and 45.73% in April.

Stats still aren't available for the NFB-Newsline® Mobile app, but I can assure you by the number of phone calls and e-mails I get; subscribers are using it frequently. It's a convenient and discreet way to access your favorite newspaper on the go and in the garden. In February NFB-Newsline® Mobile was inducted into the AppleVis iOS App Hall of Fame. AppleVis is a popular website for blind and low vision iOS users to visit and find information on accessible apps. For more information visit: www.applevis.com.

This concludes my quarterly report. As always if you have questions please don't hesitate to contact me via phone, e-mail or on Twitter! Until next time; happy reading and let the sun shine!

Executive Director Van Zandt noted that one of the suggestions from staff about changes to make with the funding was to add a newspaper The Norfolk Daily News to Newsline. This is in the works, since many people in Northeast and Central Nebraska do read that paper.

Client Assistant Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

Director Van Zandt noted that Victoria Rasmussen is the CAP Director. She has been working with the agency on the W: Drive, the Employment Conference, she attended the State Staff meeting and provided training to the two new staff members about CAP.

Two CAP cases:

The first individual was told he needed to take typing classes in order to use the computer. He was uncomfortable with that and didn't want to take typing classes. She talked with the client about the fact he needs to become comfortable with the keyboard in order to use the computer with his limited vision. He understood and agreed.

Another individual felt the Commission was not providing placement services. Reviewed the file, talked with staff and supervisor involved and determined the Commission was doing everything they could to help this individual be successful.

Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update

Carlos Serván provided an update on the Nebraska Business Enterprise.

New contract with DOR we need to up-grade the vending machines to be in compliance with the ADA. We will get all of those machines before the end of the federal fiscal year.

New contract with Joint Forces is ready and the vendor should start at any time.

The two vendors in Omaha started to run seven new Post Office small locations added to their management.

Don Ward attended the Sagebrush Conference in February. This is the Business Enterprise program division for the ACB. Carlos Serván is attending the BLAST Conference from May 20-23. This is the Business Enterprise program division for the NFB.

The next Vendors Committee meeting is on May 17 and they will have elections.

A break was taken at 1:55 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 2:05 p.m.

New Business

State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) – Annual goals and resource plan from the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

Director Van Zandt reported that the State Voc Rehab agencies have to do an annual State Plan. The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) also has to complete a State Plan for Independent Living called the SPIL every three years. The SPIL must be a joint effort on the part of SILC, the General Agency for Voc Rehab and the Blind agency which is NCBVI. Bob Deaton sits on the Council and is involved throughout the year working on the goals and the development of the goals. On an annual basis the directors of the agencies and key Council people get together to finalize the plan and to come up with the resource plan which is that the two Voc Rehab agencies provide the funding for the Statewide Council and for the Panhandle Independent Living Services.

The Resource Plan provides a three year plan for the funding. The Plan must be approved by each agency. The SPIL and the Resource Plan was sent to the Board earlier this month. There are four main goals:

Goal 1: People with disabilities in Nebraska including but not limited to people with mental illness and acquired brain injuries have access to supports and services necessary for individuals to have the choice to achieve and maintain Independent Living; these include but are not limited to health care, employment, transportation.

Goal 2: People in Nebraska have access to full information on Independent Living services available in Nebraska for people with disabilities, including but not limited to people with mental illness and/or acquired brain injury.

Goal 3: To improve the capacity and build sustainability for the existing three (3) Centers for Independent Living plus two (2) satellite offices and NESILC.

Goal 4: Capacity Building for Youth Leadership for youth with disabilities in Nebraska.

Director Van Zandt asked the Board if they had any questions about the materials she sent to them. There were no questions.

This year, they are requesting action from the NCBVI Commission Board to approve the draft Goals and Resource Plan as submitted.

Commissioner Walla moved to approve the draft Goals and Resource Plan as submitted. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all were in favor of the motion.

Discuss & Act on New State Personnel Evaluation Tool

Wes Majerus, Program Manager for Technology, reported that the State of Nebraska is working on using a Performance Appraisal System. Wes noted that he first learned about this last September or October. This is a web based system based on the Cornerstone on Demand Management System. Wes explained how the system is to work. Wes Majerus and Mike Floyd have been testing the system for accessibility issues. They found that there are some accessibility defects with the system. Sometimes it is hard to know where you are in the system due to page titles, unlabeled form fields, unlabeled graphics, etc. They reported these issues to Cornerstone on Demand who makes the software. It was determined at that time by Executive Director Van Zandt that NCBVI would not use the system until it was accessible. This was reported to AS-State Personnel. The inclement weather in February caused a meeting between them and Cornerstone to be postponed. Wes just learned last week that Cornerstone officials will be coming to Nebraska on May 9 to talk to them. Essentially, Wes noted that he was last in the system in February and then he went into it some on May 3 to look around. Wes noted that he has not noticed that anything has changed. In February Wes took some of the resource documents from the State of Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC) regarding the accessibility policy. One of the resource documents is a series of checklists and one of those are the website accessibility questionnaire. Wes noted issues found as they went through the review steps. Wes footnoted a document that showed where issues they found could be run against items on the statewide checklist that failed. This was shared with Cornerstone and he has not yet seen a response to that regard.

In looking at the system in a broader way, the goals and job duties are first entered by the employee, the supervisor or HR personnel. An employee then essentially goes into the system and rates themselves. This review then goes to the supervisor. The supervisor conducts that same review on the employee. Then it comes back to the employee for their review and the employee and supervisor talk about it. At this time, it goes up to the indirect manager, which is the supervisor's supervisor, and then goes back to the supervisor for final approval. Basically, everything is completed electronically and it keeps a history of the employee performance evaluations.

We noted that at this time he feels that it may be a long and drawn out process in getting the accessibility issues resolved; however he may feel differently after the May 9 meeting.

Chairperson Johnson stated that in her discussion with State Personnel a few weeks ago, it was mentioned that State Personnel has this new evaluation tool, and although agencies will not be required to use it during their executive director evaluations, it will be available. It was strongly encouraged that agencies use this tool. At this time, Chairperson Johnson thought that this may be a great option. This is an option that can be considered in the future, but it is not a decision that needs to be made today.

It was also expressed in that conversation that whatever evaluation tool agencies use, it has to be approved by State Personnel. State Personnel will no longer be approving any other evaluation tool except for theirs. At this time it was not mentioned that the system is not accessible.

It was the consensus that NCBVI needs to force the issue of the software being accessible. Carlos Serván suggested that Chairperson Johnson and the Board write a letter to AS-State Personnel and to those involved to state the concerns of NCBVI.

Chairperson Johnson requested that Kathy Stephens send Chairperson Johnson the names and addresses to send the letter to.

Discuss & Act on Addressing the Changing Needs of Clients

Chairperson Johnson stated that she has been informed that overall we are seeing a trend of clients with multiple disabilities or other life circumstances that create unique situations and challenges for the counselor to provide meaningful service. Chairperson Johnson asked what are we doing now that is working really great and what more can we do.

Director Van Zandt stated that NCBVI is partnering with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) on the equipment distribution program. NCBVI also recently put on training for the Support Service

Providers who provide services to people who are deaf and blind. NCBVI staff and supervisors have to come up with ideas for training for multiple disabilities. NCBVI usually supports staff who wish to attend training on a wide range of multiple disabilities and other skills they may need.

NCBVI staff also does a good job in connecting with the local resources and learning from them or tapping into their knowledge base. Pearl asked if any staff wanted to add to this.

Jeff Altman noted that one of the areas that staff has to address is other cultures. We are seeing more and more clients with language barriers.

Commissioner Hansen asked how language barriers are handled. Director Van Zandt noted that interpreters may be hired and NCBVI also uses Language Link which is a way of getting an interpreter on the phone. Director Van Zandt added that NCBVI has also paid for clients to attend classes for English as a second language. Connie Daly noted that Bob Deaton has set up meetings with Development Disability Services in order that we can coordinate our services better with them. Connie stated that NCBVI has always served individuals with a lot of disabilities and have had to problem solve.

Chairperson Johnson inquired as to what NCBVI does when we have individuals with English as a second language or persons with a hearing impairment that could be using an interpreter, but they do not want those accommodations.

Fatos noted that this is a cultural issue which she also sees in her community in Turkey. Some cultures only have a few interpreters and they do not want what they are trying to say to be altered. It is basically a trust issue.

Connie Daly noted that this has not really been a problem at NCBVI.

Chairperson Johnson asked if Hadley School for the Blind offered classes on English as a second language. The answer to this question was not known. It was noted that Hadley offers a GED program.

Chairperson Johnson asked if anyone had any additional questions or comments. There were none.

Discuss & Act on Staff Training Opportunities

There was no additional information to report on this topic.

Discuss & Act on Conducting an Agency Forum

Chairperson Johnson noted that there are two things that she would like to discuss. Her first idea was to have State Staff meeting follow-up. It was her

feeling that the meeting did not really have closure. The Agency Forum was the last item on the agenda and time ran out. Chairperson Johnson stated that she is looking at having some additional time to discuss and share ideas.

Commissioner Hansen stated that he feels that some of the reasons for staff frustration has come out today and he would like to see NCBVI continue to have discussions like today. Commissioner Hansen stated that he was happy to see some of the openness that occurred at the State Staff meeting. Some of what was said was difficult to hear, but sometimes it is needed in order to move forward. Commissioner Hansen added that he did not know if NCBVI needed a specific time set aside for an Agency Forum, but he would like to continue to see opportunities for discussion. Commissioner Hansen noted that this is his opinion, but he is open to other ideas and suggestions.

Jeff Altman stated that he feels that the Agency Forum idea would be fine, but he feels that ground rules would need to be set. All commissioners agreed. Director Van Zandt noted that there is only a few staff at today's meeting. Director Van Zandt feels that now that Commissioner Hansen's invitation is on record, staff has an open invitation to contact the Commission Board and let them know what their needs are. Commissioner Hansen confirmed that this is what he meant to say. Director Van Zandt reported that NCBVI administration is having conversations with different groupings of staff about how we can address the items that are morale issues. The idea of an Agency Forum is one idea. Director Van Zandt stated that she does take seriously people's morale and the work that we all do. Administration will continue to address items in a way that is productive.

Vice Chairperson Jirak stated that he likes the idea Jeff Altman had about an Agency Forum with ground rules. Vice Chairperson Jirak noted that they could consider a conference call agency forum over a period of a few months.

Chairperson Johnson stated she would like to move to the next agenda item at this time because the two items fit together.

Discuss & Act on Utilization of an Organizational Development Specialist

Commissioner Hansen reported that because of the openness and tension that has been building for a while, he reached out to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) who is contracted out to Best Care. He spoke to them in order to get ideas on ways to help with situations like this. The EAP Program has experience and knowledge in handling situations like this. From a Board's perspective, when they have spoken about it, there is some lack of exact knowledge in where the situations lie. The Board knows that they exist, but they do not know all the details. It is hard for the Board to understand the root cause of some things. The EAP Provider Best Care has experience in discovering these things while acting as an outside consultant.

Chairperson Johnson noted that by utilizing an organizational development specialist they are looking at the concept of bringing in a resource that specializes in communications within an organization and having them work with us on communications and teamwork.

Chairperson Johnson noted that NCBVI has a philosophy or a core value that our services should be client directed. It is the client who decides what career they want to go into and what they need to learn to get to that goal. NCBVI very much supports independence in the clients. Chairperson Johnson stated that it is important to be mindful as we move forward that we maintain that same value system throughout the agency. Chairperson Johnson added that she wants this process to be viewed as a training opportunity for staff.

Commissioner Hansen moved that NCBVI obtain the services of an Organizational Development Specialist to work with the Board and Executive Director Van Zandt and any staff she would like to include to come up with a plan of implementation. Commissioner Hansen will provide Executive Director Van Zandt with EAP Best Care contact information. Commissioner Jirak seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all voted in favor of the motion.

It was decided that Chairperson Johnson and Commissioner Hansen will be the representatives from the Board.

Discuss & Act on State Plan consideration and approval

The commissioners received a draft of the State Plan prior to today's meeting and they have had the opportunity to review it. Chairperson Johnson noted that there were a few places in the draft State Plan where figures still need to be inserted.

Commissioner Hansen noted that in the Order of Selection section there is no order to find since NCBVI serves all Nebraskans and we have no need for a waiting list at this time. Commissioner Hansen also noted that if NCBVI decides to offer its services to other states, perhaps this should be included in the State Plan.

Executive Director Van Zandt gave an overview of the contents of the State Plan. The part of the sections that need to be edited yet relate to our results on items such as Standards and Indicators which is simply plugging in data when we get it. These are also tied to actual goals of the agency. Director Van Zandt noted that she thinks the goals will be approximately the same as what are pretty consistent to what they had been.

Director Van Zandt stated that a conference call meeting can be scheduled to review the final draft if the Board wishes to do that before the deadline.

Commissioner Hansen stated that he is an opponent of approving something that is an unfinished document. Therefore, even though he agrees with everything presented today, he would be for having an additional meeting to approve a final draft.

After discussion, it was decided to schedule a Commission meeting for Saturday, June 22, 2013 in Lincoln. This will be an in-person meeting. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. The commissioners will vote on the approval of the draft State Plan at the June 22 meeting.

Public Comment

Mark Bulger – Mark thanked the commission board for all the work that they do. It was good to see so many public persons attending the meeting today. Mark stated that typically when blind people come to the NCBVI they are broken (for a lack of a better word), either physically, mentally or emotionally broken and they need help. NCBVI is the life line and is to provide the support needed. With that being said, when a person comes to NCBVI broken, the last thing they want to sense is communication problems and difficulties. Somehow this needs to get under control so the energy and effort can be directed towards the consumers. Mark noted that a lot of organizations have problems, so he does not feel this is a blind thing. Communication is very important. Mark stated that he feels that the most problematic employees are those who are not being used efficiently. Also, it may be a matter of empowering. Staff may not feel empowered to do the things that they are gifted to do. Most people do not lose their jobs because they are incapable, but because they cannot get along with others. Staff also needs to be held accountable and they need to be given the resources they need.

Mark also noted that he thinks the Board should have given Executive Director Van Zandt the authority and power to approve the State Plan. The State has limited resources and ultimately it is the Director's responsibility.

Final Announcements

There were no final announcements.

Adjourn

Commissioner Jirak moved to adjourn the May 4, 2013 Commission Board meeting at 4:15 p.m. Commissioner Hansen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the June 22, 2013 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Julie Johnson, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners