Calling All Braillists!

In response to the need to provide more direct support for skilled braillists in Nebraska, NCECBVI took the initiative last school year to implement twice-a-year professional development workshops specific to the needs of this group.

Last fall, an open house was held at NCECBVI with 17 braillists in attendance. During the open house, braillists introduced themselves, shared each of their roles in their district/ESU, discussed the transition to UEB, and gave suggestions for future professional development workshops. Based on feedback from the group, a Duxbury workshop was offered in the spring, with 24 people in attendance. This fall, NCECBVI is bringing in an assistive technology specialist from the Kansas State School for the Blind to address technology as it relates to braillists. In the spring of 2016, training will be offered in the area of tactile graphics.

If you know a braillist who is not yet a part of this outstanding networking and training opportunity, send them our way. The input has been very positive from participants and a sample of that input follows:

Kristi Rooney, Omaha Public Schools’ Braillist, provided these comments:

“I’m writing to thank the NCECBVI staff for the support and professional development opportunities you are providing for me and other braillists from across the state. Last year’s training and Fall Open House answered and clarified many of the questions I had regarding UEB implementation. This February’s Duxbury Workshop was an excellent...
Specialized Workgroups Gather at NCECBVI

In addition to the Braillist Team, NCECBVI has implemented three additional workgroups—one in the area of technology, another focusing on cortical visual impairment (CVI), and a third that is bringing the orientation and mobility specialists together. Created based on data and feedback from stakeholders, each of the professional development team brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the group, is representative of teachers serving a diverse group of students and areas in Nebraska, and is focused on providing information to individuals statewide.

The Technology Outreach and Support Team (TOAST) team began last year with a group of teachers of the visually impaired who have a special interest in technology. Throughout the year this team developed their first project—a website where teachers can gain assistance with not only knowing what kinds of technology are available for their students, but also providing guidance of how to narrow the possibilities of which devices may be most appropriate.

Elissa Heibel, team member from ESU 7 commented, “I’m so glad to be part of a team with people who have so much knowledge and talent in the area of technology. I hope that the first project we’ve been working on will help teachers become more comfortable with assistive technology by knowing what is available and how these devices may meet the needs of their students.”

Ko Inamura, team member who also serves as the vision assistive technology liaison for Lincoln Public Schools stated, “TOAST is an exciting opportunity for me. Our team has worked on creating an online vision assistive technology guidance engine that works like a strategy recommendation process, taking into account a range of visual acuities, age levels, and student needs. I hope this online tool will help teachers get ideas and/or confirm their thoughts about what devices and strategies may be best for their students.”

CVI Workgroup team members came together for the first time this September. With the number of students diagnosed with cortical visual impairment growing quickly, it has become a priority to pull together a group of TVIs who have a special interest in this area. The goal of the CVI Workgroup is to develop practical, hands-on, ready-to-use resources for professionals. Team members will be focusing on the areas of assessment and instruction and plan to meet quarterly.

The orientation and mobility specialists work with students to teach them to be confident and independent in a variety of environments and to travel safely. With a specialized skillset, it is important for this group to come together to share information about best practice, research-based strategies, and the unique challenges they face when working with students. Members of this group, range from individuals with several years of experience in the field to those currently taking classes to become certified as O&M instructors through Salus University, a collaborative effort with NCECBVI and the Nebraska Department of Education. The O&M Workgroup looks forward to meeting (three times) each school year.

Calling All Braillists!

training day. It strengthened my skills and gave me new tools for use in the transcription process. It’s such an encouragement to meet and network with others who work in my profession. Thank you for giving me the chance to put faces to names of so many area braillists, paras, and teachers. I’m looking forward to the next workshop!”
NCECBVI is excited to offer several activities related to the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), a curriculum focused on a skillset specific to meeting the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. We look forward to having students and parents join us from across the state for the following activities:

• Sunday, November 13: ECC & Me: Art Activity
  Preschool & School Age Students
  Held at Michael’s Craft Store in Lincoln (48th and R Street)
  Students will be creating art projects to be submitted to the American Printing House (APH) InSights Art Competition. Winners will receive an all-expense paid trip to Louisville, KY, for the annual APH meeting in October 2017.

• Wednesday, February 8: Braille Challenge
  Open to students in grades 1-12
  Held at NCECBVI in Nebraska City
  Students will participate in the only national contest for braille students in the U.S. During the student competition, parents are invited to participate in a social skills workshop presented by Dr. Sharon Sacks, Superintendent of the California School for the Blind.

• Wednesday, March 1: Registration goes ‘live’ for Sizzlin’ Summer Camp & Family Weekend on the NCECBVI website!
  Dates for Camp are June 19-23, 2017
  Dates for Family Weekend will be announced later this year.

Sunday, March 5: ECC & Me: Clothing/Laundry Activities & Self-Advocacy Workshop
Parents and Middle School/High School Students
Held at NCECBVI in Nebraska City
Based on requests from parents, this day will involve all members of the family to answer questions such as, ‘How can my student select clothes that make a coordinated outfit?’ and ‘What strategies can I use to teach my child to do their own laundry?’ Students will be discussing the importance of understanding their visual impairment and how they can appropriately share their individual strengths and challenges with others. Following are comments from Nancy Solsaa, a parent from Waverly, who attended the Follow Me and See parent workshop.

“Last April for Follow Me & See, parents had the opportunity to meet and spend time in the kitchen with Chef Laura Martinez. Chef Laura and her husband have opened their own restaurant in Chicago called LaDiosa. Chef Laura shared her story with us: she was born in Mexico and lost her sight at a young age due to retinoblastoma in both eyes. Her family moved to America when she was nine years old and she was able to go Nancy Solsaa experiences various kitchen duties blindfolded under the guidance of Chef Laura.

continued on page 4
In the fall, Nebraska City is all about apples so why not incorporate this into the classroom along with an instructional aid from the Nebraska Instructional Resource Center? Madison, a student at NCECBVI (from Falls City), “picks” apples which are textured circles from the Textured Sorting Circles and Shapes (APH product) each time she correctly identifies a word. She finds this motivating and is making positive progress toward her goal. She clapped each time she “picked” an apple and said, “Who’s having a good day?”

This kit is well organized, quick and easy to change activities such as sorting, bingo, Venn diagram, and more. This is a great way to incorporate fun with learning which Madison says, “she can’t wait to do.”

The kit also includes checklists that can be used for quick assessments. In class, Madison can easily read and interact with the print/braille magnets and she can even play with another braille or low vision student (due to the high contrast). She can also play with a student without visual impairment. Blank white magnetic labels (in a variety of lengths) are included to make additional word labels. Blue magnetic sorting strips are also included.

Madison likes to have her board supported on a bookstand with a black background to enhance access. The kit is UEB compliant, so Madison and her friends are learning by using the most up-to-date materials. They will soon be reading many books of her choice. Way to go, Madison!

Please contact the staff in the Nebraska Instructional Resource Center to learn more about the products available to assist you and your students.

Coming Soon for Students & Families!

Madison Radley & Mrs. Schomerus use All Aboard! To Learn High Frequency Sight Words

All Aboard! Check This Out for Your Students Today!

to school for the first time. She loved learning English, Braille, reading, and mobility skills. She was able to move out of her family home and live on her own. With determination and persistence she graduated from cooking school. Chef Laura demonstrated her cooking abilities for us. She skillfully sliced strawberries. She could hear when the frosting had thickened in the mixer. She felt the difference between various white powders such as flour, baking powder and baking soda. Parents took turns wearing sleep shades to do some cooking under the direction of Chef Laura. Her patient instruction and guidance were an example to us. She encouraged us to be active in the kitchen with our kids. We had fun in the kitchen, learned about perseverance and courage, observed skilled cooking, learned some tips, and ate some tasty food.”

Many of the student and family activities come from ideas shared by parents, students and teachers. Plan today to join us for these upcoming offerings. We welcome your ideas for future events.
To address the critical shortage of orientation and mobility specialists in Nebraska, NCECBVI, the Nebraska Department of Education, and Salus University partnered to offer a masters degree/certification program in Nebraska. Funding is being provided by a federal grant (through Salus University) and the Nebraska Department of Education. Five individuals answered the call, enrolled in the program, and have been greatly dedicated and working hard on classes for three semesters.

During the summer of 2016, these five ladies called NCECBVI their home-away-from home. Classes were held on the NCECBVI campus, and on the streets of Nebraska City, Omaha and Lincoln. The summer course and field work was coordinated by two instructors, and this also included “adjunct help” from several of our current COMS (Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists) in Nebraska. This specialized training involves a village of teachers, mentors, and administrators who have come together to address this great need.

This fall, the students traveled to the Salus University campus in Pennsylvania and participated in a full week packed with knowledge, skills, and experiences in a true “big” city.

“As of today, we only have nine certified orientation and mobility specialists teaching in Nebraska schools. And according to the Nebraska Instructional Resource Center, we have over 800 students in Nebraska who are verified with some type of visual impairment. That’s tragic,” Sally Schreiner stated.

Some of the Salus students are teachers of the visually impaired and some come with little to no education background. Therefore, this group of future instructors has come into the program with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives. The Salus students are from Nebraska City, Bellevue and Columbus.

“As these students finish the training program in the next couple of years, we look forward to having them serve Nebraska students. I always remind administrators to please start now searching for new teachers of the visually impaired – so we don’t overload these new Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists. And most importantly, always be in ‘recruitment’ mode as we would love to enter this type of agreement again because we obviously still need more people trained in this area,” Schreiner said.
Over the past two summers, NCECBVI’s Sizzlin’ Summer Camp has been held at Camp Catron in Nebraska City. Summer camp usually takes place at NCECBVI, however due to a variety of work being done to the school, we needed a new venue, and Camp Catron was the perfect fit! Students had the opportunity to complete the Challenge Course which showcased a Rock Wall, Zip Line, Giant Swing, and The Flying Squirrel. Other activities included a scavenger hunt, archery, pottery, swimming, fishing, and various team building activities.

One of the highlights of the week was an invitation to the University of Nebraska – Lincoln to tour the Bob Devaney Sports Complex and Memorial Stadium. Students met a few of national champion volleyball players during their practice, a star football defensive end, Freedom Akinmoladun, along with the “Voice of the Huskers” Greg Sharpe. The day was topped off with a chance to run out onto the football field with the tunnel walk music blaring!

The smiles said it all thanks to this invitation from Lawrence Chatters, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator in Life Skills at University of Nebraska Athletics. Mr. Chatters shared that he has a visual impairment and attended various camps at the school for the blind in Nebraska City many years ago. So he was delighted to have students come to Lincoln for this big day and share his story with them. Thank you, Lawrence, and GO BIG RED!!!
The Nebraska AER Chapter was well represented at the AER International Conference 2016 which was held in July (Jacksonville, Florida). Participating in this year’s conference was prideful as the Nebraska AER Chapter was awarded the AER Outstanding Chapter Award 2016. Audrey Graves, Nebraska AER Chapter President, accepted the award on behalf of the Chapter officers and members.

Sally Schreiner, NCECBVI Administrator, nominated the chapter. “As a Past President, I have been totally amazed and impressed with the progress the current officers and chapter representatives have made with membership recruitment, benefits and involvement. It was an easy decision to make this nomination.”

The Nebraska Chapter holds membership drives at the annual fall and spring statewide conferences held at NCECBVI. They offer incentives for members who may receive the benefit of having their dues paid and/or registration fees paid for various professional development offerings. These incentives have increased the Chapter’s membership. As reported by AER in April 2014, the Nebraska Chapter had over a 46% increase in membership – the largest percentage of all chapters.

“Personally, I’m proud of the strong partnership the Nebraska Chapter has had historically with NCECBVI. They have joined together to sponsor teachers from across our state to attend the international conference, sponsor nationally known experts for statewide conferences for educators, and support the Nebraska Regional Braille Challenge,” added Schreiner.

The Nebraska Chapter has created thoughtful, inventive ways (that are also fun) to increase membership and provide meaningful professional development. In turn, Nebraska educators (and their students) greatly benefit from the positive change and support of their efforts.

Inspiring NCECBVI Students

On Sept. 9, Harald Vik (right), 73, of Drammen, Norway, tells Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired students about his life as an avid bicyclist, runner and cross-country skier while being deaf and blind. Vik had two translators during the presentation – one translating from English to Norwegian and the other translating sign language to the NCECBVI students and staff.

Vik learned sign language from his mother and was born deaf. He lost his vision as a child.

At the age of Harald Vik tells his life story to NCECBVI students with the assistance of his interpreter, Torben. (Photo by Nikki Carlson. Article with permission, reprinted from the Nebraska City News-Press).
Need Help with the ACT Test for Your Students? Contact NCECBVI!

NCECBVI is offering something new for students who are blind or visually impaired – ACT Test Administration.

Audrey Graves, Principal at NCECBVI, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, and Special Education Teacher has been administering the ACT for many years. This experience allowed her to become familiar with the accommodations available along with acquiring the knowledge needed to fill out the paperwork to request special testing accommodations.

Jenna Mares, student at Columbus High School, wanted to come to NCECBVI to take the ACT because she is familiar with our school and felt that we knew what accommodations along with adaptive equipment was needed to take the ACT. Audrey Graves worked alongside Jenna’s Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Judy Zadina. Jenna has participated in variety of programs at NCECBVI, such as Braille Challenge and Sizzlin’ Summer Camp, and stated that she feels very comfortable in our setting.

Jenna will graduate this year from Columbus Public Schools in December 2016. She will then attend the Independent Living Skills training program (in Lincoln) at the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She then plans to go to college. At this time, Jenna wants to pursue a degree in education and hopes to become a Teacher of the Visually Impaired so she can help students who need to learn Braille.

To request ACT Test Administration at NCECBVI, please contact: Audrey Graves at agraves@esu4.net.

Inspiring NCECBVI Students

of 13, he met American author, political activist and lecturer Helen Keller at a deaf school. At the age of 38, he married a 21-year-old deaf woman, who later became blind. Four years later, his wife died tragically from a brain tumor.

He eventually started riding a tandem biking, cross-country skiing and running. He was the first deaf and blind person to ever finish in the New York Marathon and Nov. 6 will be his 24th time competing in and finishing the race. He recalled participating in a 30-day biking tour throughout Europe and meeting the Pope, who was intrigued with Vik and gave him a gold crucifix that he still has today. He has also competed in many biking competitions as well and admitted that biking is his favorite activity.

He inspired NCECBVI students to live their lives to the fullest and to always stay physically active.
Join us in welcoming Leslie Wagner to NCECBVI! Leslie will be part of the outreach team and will serve statewide as a Transition Specialist. Leslie, her husband and children have moved to Nebraska City from Holdrege where she was a special education teacher and transition coordinator. Leslie has great experience in setting up job sites, administering vocational assessments, writing transition plans and IEP goals, coordinating post-secondary services and has had much training in the area of autism.

As a teacher of the visually impaired, are you struggling to find time to address the expanded core curriculum? Do you have the transition plan in place for your student to exit their high school education? Do your IEPs include post-secondary goals based on your student’s interest and preferences (as required by law)? Are the parents of your students prepared for their child to transition into adult services and/or post-secondary education; and are they knowledgeable about guardianship? If any of these questions have led you to yell, “Help!” then don’t hesitate to contact Leslie Wagner at NCECBVI. She will gladly travel to your district and share her expertise in the area of transition for you, your students, and parents.

Transition Services – A New Statewide Priority For NCECBVI

Staff Member attends AER International Conference

I had the good fortune of attending the 2016 AER International Conference in Jacksonville, Florida as the guest of the Nebraska AER Chapter. As a current Nebraska AER member, my name was put in a drawing to have my conference registration fees paid to attend this conference and NCECBVI paid for the flight and hotel. I cannot thank the Nebraska AER Chapter and NCECBVI enough for making this opportunity possible.

In working for Omaha Public Schools, I am able to focus primarily in the area of Orientation and Mobility, so the majority of sessions I attended pertained to this area of our field. I was able to hear experts discuss a variety of topics from Early Childhood O&M Assessments to Preparing for O&M at College—and just about everything in between! From hearing about the Cane Quest movement (similar to Braille Challenge, but testing orientation and mobility skills) to the use of Mobile apps in our lesson planning, most aspects of our jobs were covered.

Perhaps of most interest to the larger TVI/O&M crowd, however, was the session on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Transition planning. With the changed focus on transitions driven by the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), many school districts and agencies are retooling their assessment process to include heavier focus on the ECC and transition planning pre-taught to our students and should start early in their development.

I could continue on forever with the many ideas I gained at the conference! Needless to say, it was an amazing and invigorating five days after which I thought my head might explode with the many ideas and new information I gained. Thank you again for such a wonderful opportunity!

Amy Bova
Program Description

• A combination of vocational and independent living experiences to prepare individuals for employment
• Teaches and promotes self-advocacy skills
• Designed for students who are blind or visually impaired, who could benefit from transition-related instruction, including students with multiple disabilities
• Expanded Core Curriculum areas (specific skills identified for students who are blind or visually impaired) will be addressed as part of the program, which include: Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills (including Communication Modes), Orientation and Mobility, Social Interaction Skills, Independent Living Skills, Recreation and Leisure Skills, Career Education, Use of Assistive Technology, Sensory Efficiency Skills, and Self-Determination
• Students will develop a transition portfolio to take with them upon completion of the program, so they may use it when applying for jobs in the future
• Follows a school-year schedule

Work Component

• Participants will spend part of their school day working at a business located in Nebraska City and/or on campus at NCECBVI
• A teacher of the visually impaired and para educators who have received training as job coaches and who understand the unique needs of students who are blind or visually impaired will be supporting students in their work environment(s)
• Related services will be provided as identified on the student’s IEP, which may include: orientation and mobility lessons, speech/language services, occupational and physical therapy, and assistive technology
• Instruction will be provided on resume writing, cover letter composition, interviewing skills, searching for jobs, and completing applications
• Evaluations will be conducted regularly to assess the numerous transition-related skills

Residential Component

• Students are encouraged to be residential students, as ECC skills focused on during school hours will continue to be emphasized during non-school hours
• Participants reside in a dorm room or apartment
• Students become increasingly responsible for preparing their own meals, taking care of their residence, managing a household budget, and more
• An emphasis on an effective balance between work and leisure time will be a priority

For more information, please contact:

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Campus Administrator  
402-873-5513  
sschreiner@esu4.net

Audrey Graves  
Principal  
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a Graves@esu4.net

Tanya Hilligoss  
Outreach Director  
402-873-5513  
thilligoss@esu4.net

Leslie Wagner  
Transition Specialist  
402-873-5513  
wagner@esu4.net
Why consider placement at NCECBVI for transition services? Students with vision loss face a unique set of challenges and the staff at NCECBVI have the expertise to create specialized programs focused on these needs. Programming will include skills based on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) which is a specialized skill set developed for students who are blind or visually impaired.

NCECBVI staff work with students at all levels, from students who are in an academically-based program to those with severe/profound and multiple disabilities.

In addition to job training in the community or on-campus, NCECBVI also provides a residential setting where, depending on a student’s level of independence, they can live in a simulated apartment or will have their own room where they learn how to manage a schedule, organize and take care of their living space, and develop social skills related to living with peers.

Other considerations:
• Low-Cost! Tuition for the 2016-17 school year is $29,000. This cost includes all school services, residential services, and a meal program (breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served).
• NCECBVI works in partnership with local education agencies to develop and execute IEP goals and objectives, collect and analyze data, and provide assessments to drive programming for each student.
• Students follow a traditional school year schedule.
• Students return to campus on Sunday evenings or Monday mornings and go home on Friday afternoons, OR
• Individualize a program; we work with districts to create a schedule that works best for the student.
• Residential staff are on duty from after-school (and Sunday evenings) until school begins the following day which includes overnight staff who remain awake to attend to student needs at all times.
• Residential staff make NCECBVI a ‘home away from home’ by providing help with homework, assistance with bathing and bedtime routines, and coordinating and periodically attending community outings with students.
• NCECBVI instructors are endorsed teachers of the visually impaired.
• All staff are trained in CPR, CPI (de-escalation training), and have been trained to administer medications when appropriate.
• A school nurse (RN or LPN) are regularly on campus and are always available for consultation (24/7).
• Related services (speech, OT, PT, O&M) are provided as part of the program and the staff has expertise in serving students with vision loss.
• The NCECBVI school psychologist, who is also an endorsed teacher of the visually impaired, evaluates each student upon their arrival at NCECBVI and will evaluate again based on the needs of the student. An updated evaluation is provided for each student when they are ready to exit the program which is beneficial for adult service agencies and/or post-secondary institutions.
• A transition specialist is available to assist with each student’s individualized program. We invite you to visit NCECBVI to learn more!
The mission of NCECBVI is to improve the learning of children who are blind or visually impaired through a commitment to communication, accountability, and leadership.

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

- October 28, 2016: Parent/Teacher Conferences
- November 1, 2016: CVI Workgroup Meeting
- November 13, 2016: ECC & Me Student/Family Art Activity at Michael’s Store (48th & R Streets, Lincoln, NE)
- November 17, 2016: NCECBVI Vision Stakeholder Team Meeting
- November 23, 2016: 12:30 Student Dismissal for Thanksgiving Break
- November 24-25, 2016: NCECBVI Closed for Thanksgiving Break
- December 1, 2016: Orientation and Mobility Workgroup Meeting
- December 21, 2016: Holiday Music Program
- December 22, 2016: Holiday Break
- January 4, 2017: Dorms Reopen
- January 5, 2017: Classes Resume
- January 9, 2017: Orientation and Mobility Workgroup Meeting
- January 10, 2017: Nebraska Regional Braille Challenge
- February 3, 2017: CVI Workgroup Meeting
- February 8, 2017: NCECBVI Closed for Mid-Winter Break
- February 10-17, 2017: NCECBVI Spring Low Vision Clinic

Leadership Team:

- Sally Schreiner: Administrator
- Audrey Graves: Principal
- Tanya Hilligoss: Outreach Director
- Susan Pope: Nebraska Instructional Resource Center Coordinator
- Dana Welch: Homelife Supervisor
- Karen Kindred: Food Services Coordinator

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