NCECBVI Has New Theme and New Faces!

Each year, a new theme is implemented across all departments, classrooms, offices, along with all staff members and students. The smiley face symbol can be seen all over the school and is a reminder of the tone set for the year. “Positively Awesome” reminds us about the power of a positive attitude and the success we can achieve from believing every day is going to be awesome.

In addition to a new theme, NCECBVI welcomes several new faces to the staff roster.
Sara Reuss Receives the Markussen Scholarship

The Karen Markussen Trust Fund is administered by the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and the Nebraska Department of Education. Ms. Markussen served as a teacher of the visually impaired in Central Nebraska for many years. She passed away on July 16, 2006. It was her wish to assist teachers who are pursuing their degree to teach children with visual impairments in Nebraska.

An annual $500 scholarship is awarded to a student in his or her senior year of a vision or orientation/mobility endorsement/degree program for the purpose of completing such endorsement/degree. This scholarship is intended to assist teachers professionally. Utilization of funds may include but are not limited to; resources to build a professional toolkit, college course costs, membership in professional organizations, costs related to professional development conferences and opportunities, etc.

The 2017 Karen Markussen Scholarship recipient was Sara Reuss. Sara has worked at NCECBVI for many years as a residential assistant in the boy’s dorm. After returning to school for her degree and national certification in orientation and mobility, she is now serving as the NCECBVI Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). She is serving all of the students in the center-based program and a few students from a nearby school district. Following are her comments.

Last school year, I was humbled and honored to receive the 2017 Karen Markussen Scholarship. The monetary support was immensely appreciated as well as the honor of carrying on Karen’s memory. Through congratulations I received from many vision professionals around the state, I was able to learn more about the amazing woman whose name is honored on this scholarship. I can only hope that I live up to her memory and to touch lives as she has done. It was a very busy summer for me. I utilized the support from the scholarship to make the trek, by car, to the Helen Keller National Center on Long Island, New York. I was able to intern under a giant in the field of orientation and mobility through instructing Deaf/Blind individuals on Long Island as well as throughout New York City for the entire summer. This experience was invaluable to me as an orientation and mobility specialist. The support also helped me to accelerate my program and begin instructing at NCECBVI immediately upon my return for the 2017-2018 year. I am so grateful for the support to work professionally in a field that I love and a field where Karen had an amazing influence.

Sara Reuss

American Printing House for the Blind
Matt Connect: Smart Tablet-Based Magnifier

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has released a new electronic near and distant magnifier called the MATT Connect. Students can magnify a print document, read a book from an online library, conduct internet research, view a distant or connected Smart Board in a classroom, along with write and email assignments.

It is an Android Tablet, which is similar to iPad, but is run by an operating system designed by Google.

The MATT Connect has two cameras, one looks
Lourdes Central Catholic Schools are True Friends

At the annual spring Lourdes Central Catholic Schools fundraiser, Sally Schreiner, NCECBVI Administrator, and Dana Welch, NCECBVI Residential Supervisor, made a surprise presentation to the LCC Administration in front of a packed gym of parents, students, families and community members. Nebraska City’s Lourdes Schools were presented with the Friend of NCECBVI Award. For many years, the LCC students, staff and coaches have gone above and beyond in including the NCECBVI students in activities and events.

Each month, students from the LCC service club come to NCECBVI to learn about braille, orientation and mobility and spend quality time with the students and jointly participating in a variety of educational and recreational activities.

You will also find NCECBVI students attending a variety of events at LCC such as sporting events, music and band concerts, and high school musicals. The NCECBVI students have been known to sing the national anthem at basketball games, join the team on the bench to support the basketball players during a game, and serve as a greeter to hand out programs at volleyball games.

Go Lady Knights!

NCECBVI hosted the 8th annual Lourdes Central Catholic Schools Lady Knights volleyball team dinner on August 30th. This dinner isn’t just about food, it is about so much more. The team socializes with the NCECBVI students, many photos are taken and several cheers are chanted.

NCECBVI made a poster for the team which hangs in the Lourdes’ gym letting them know that NCECBVI thinks they are Positively Awesome!
As the school year arrived, NCECBVI learned of a departure of one of our key department leaders. Susan Pope resigned as NIRC Coordinator in order to pursue her doctoral degree full-time at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This is a great opportunity for Susan that couldn’t be passed up. NCECBVI lost a valuable resource, but Nebraska and the field of visual impairments gained a champion.

The NIRC Department is known for their expertise and incredible service to teachers and families in our state. That will not change as Dr. Tanya Hilligoss, NCECBVI Outreach Director, stepped in and learned much about the role of NIRC Coordinator. With the outstanding NIRC workers, Kristie Chaney and Cindy Kreifels, the day-to-day material requests are totally under control!

A very important role with the NIRC programs and services is serving as a trustee for the American Printing House for the Blind. Dr. Hilligoss has been named as the Trustee for the students accounts statewide. Sally Schreiner has turned over her Trustee assignment to Audrey Graves for the students enrolled on campus. These two administrators will continue to keep the goal of having appropriate and accessible materials for Nebraska’s students as their focus when serving in this honorable role.

When the annual APH Federal Quota Registration takes place beginning in January, we are excited that Donna Hultman will step in and coordinate that process. Dr. Hilligoss will continue to serve as the “go to” for the NIRC staff but please do not hesitate to contact Tanya, Kristie, Cindy, or Donna if you have questions or concerns.

Going on a Bear Hunt!

“So you ready? Today is the Day!” “We’re going on a Bear Hunt…” are the classic words from the children’s book that everyone knows and loves. The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has created a tactile version of this classic story. As the APH website describes, “As the reader journeys across the page, sliding a small token along a path, fingers encounter waving grass, a silken stream, a squishy march, trunks of trees, and slippery snow. Feeling inside the cave reveals a furry face with big eyes, a soft nose and sharp teeth! Children are sure to identify this quickly, then run for home, where they can open the door, lock it, and hide beneath the bedcovers.”
Parents/Guardians… Mark Your Calendars!

NCECBVI is excited to bring several opportunities for the 2017-2018 for parents and families!

Leslie Wagner, Transition Specialist, kicked off the year with two transition workshops; one focusing on the needs of students with multiple disabilities and the other discussing the needs of students who are interested in post-secondary education, employment, and/or independent living.

We encourage all parents/guardians to attend upcoming workshops. For questions or to register, please contact Tanya Hilligoss, Outreach Director: thilligoss@esu4.net or call NCECBVI: 402-873-5513.

• SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2017 •
Adapting Toys and Games for Your Child
Presented by Audrey Graves, NCECBVI Principal

• SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 2018 •
Transition Workshop: MORE! about Post-Secondary, Employment, and Independent Living
Presented by Leslie Wagner, NCECBVI Transition Specialist

• TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2018 •
Audio Description Basics for Parents
(Presentation for Parents at Braille Challenge)
Presented by Donna Hullman, Audio Transcriber

• SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2018 •
What Matters Most in Your Child’s Education
Presented by Donna McNear, Educational Consultant

• SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2018 •
Establishing Positive Social Relationships: Answering the Hard Questions
Presented by Dr. Sharon Sacks, Superintendent (retired), California School for the Blind

Outreach Ads Direct Service to the NCECBVI

Rachel Zahn has worked at NCECBVI for five years. Until this year, Rachel served as a teacher of the visually impaired in the center-based program focusing on instruction based on the Expanded Core Curriculum.

NCECBVI answered the call for the need for a teacher to be able to provide direct instruction to students. Rachel stepped up to the plate and agreed to a new role serving as an outreach consultant, working in the ESU 3 and ESU 4 areas. As Rachel is on the road driving to school districts, she is able to use her teaching talents, along with her knowledge of classroom curriculum, to provide direct services to students with visual impairments.

As an outreach consultant, Rachel works with students ages birth-21 with varying degrees of vision loss and in a variety of environments. She provides guidance to classroom teachers and special education service providers, conducts assessments with students and works directly with them to complete their assignments, suggests and implements appropriate accommodations for students, utilizes assistive technology to support instruction, and overall works closely with team members to meet the individualized needs of students and staff.

Going on a Bear Hunt!

Meagan Gerdes, Teacher of the Visually Impaired at NCECBVI, introduced this book to her students at the beginning of the school year. She shared that this book provides amazing sensory experiences that tantalizes all the senses. Meagan also loves that the tactile book brings the words of this classic story to life.

In the classroom, “Bear Hunt” allows the students to be active participants in the telling of the story.
Many high school students are often asked “What are your plans after high school?” Transition services can help students and families find the answer. Transition is the process of preparing students for living, learning, and working after high school.

Recently, NCECBVI held two parent workshops on transition planning to help parents and students learn more about this process. Parents, students, and staff were able to network and connect with other families at both workshops, gaining additional insight into transition planning.

On August 26, 2017, thirteen parents and six students attended a workshop geared toward students with multiple disabilities and/or deafblindness. Leslie Wagner, NCECBVI Transition Specialist, introduced the group to the transition process including transition requirements in the IEP, connecting the Expanded Core Curriculum to transition, and introductions to agencies and services available for their students.

Parents also learned to think about work opportunities and career education for students of all levels. Seamus Kelly, an attorney who focuses on people with disabilities and their caregivers, presented on the levels of guardianship. The students enjoyed time with NCECBVI staff with recreation and leisure and social interaction activities. They enjoyed activities in the sensory garden, bowling alley, and sensory room at NCECBVI.

Parents appreciated the wealth of information they received and shared these comments, “We now have a lot of information that we didn’t know about.”

Another parent stated, “So glad we came today! It was very timely information that is relevant now. Thank you NCECBVI!” NCECBVI plans to hold another parent workshop for this group in the Fall of 2018.

The second workshop on September 10, 2017, was for parents and students who are considering college or competitive employment. Nine parents and three students attended. Treve Florom from Education Quest discussed the college preparation process including financial aid and scholarship options. Shane Buresh and Stephanie Wagle from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired discussed the services they can provide during high school and after high school to assist students with employment and independent living. In addition, they discussed what college is like and shared personal stories and advice.

Leslie Wagner finished off the workshop sharing information on parent contribution to transition IEPs, the Expanded Core Curriculum, and a few independent living tips.

Students also had the opportunity to participate in some fun recreation, leisure, and social activities at the Nebraska City orchards. They spent time in a question and answer session with UNL students from the Delta Gamma sorority learning about independent living and college life. “There was a lot of great info to go over with my child and her teachers to get ready for transition,” quoted one parent about the day.
Many students have summer jobs to help pay the bills, socialize, and stay busy for the summer. Work experiences are a great way to keep working on Expanded Core Curriculum Skills when classes aren’t in session. Thanks to the partnership with Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three NCECBVI students were able to work at community jobs in their hometowns this summer with the assistance of work site skills trainers.

Emily Kozisek worked in David City at St. Joseph’s Villa and Court, a skilled nursing facility. Some of the tasks that Emily completed independently, included meticulous folding of napkins, bedding and towels. She worked so hard, the staff often had a hard time keeping up supply to keep her busy. Tiffany Heins, a local David City Special Education teacher, served as Emily’s work site skills trainer and shared this comment after Emily’s work experience. “Emily exceeded expectations at the Villa.” Great job Emily!

The Roman L. and Victoria E. Hruska Memorial Library summer reading program was Emily’s second job site for the summer. She practiced reading braille to children during the summer reading program with twin vision books and helped with set-up and clean-up after the activities.

Seth Kadlec also worked in David City this summer. He worked at St. Joseph’s Villa in the laundry department and the Hruska Memorial Library. In addition, he practiced using local public transportation to access his job sites. He took the initiative to call and make appointments for independent transportation. “Seth knew what to do when he got to work and was always ready to work,” said Samantha Jacobson, Special Education Teacher at Wahoo Public Schools and Seth’s work site skills trainer.

Valentino’s and The Keeping Room were work sites for Nebraska City student Josh Wichman. Josh worked on washing dishes, folding pizza boxes, folding napkins and helping to keep the local restaurants running. Josh was also able to access public transportation from his home and although this was new to Josh, he did a great job. Joy Roumpf, a NCECBVI paraeducator, was able to work as Josh’s work site skills trainer.

Students made progress in Career Education, Self Determination, Independent Living Skills, Orientation & Mobility, Compensatory Access, Social Interaction, and Sensory Efficiency skills. These are all part of the vision specific functional curriculum that is the core of NCECBVI programming.

Thank you to the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Keeping Room, Valentino’s, St. Joseph’s Villa and Court, and The Roman L. and Victoria E. Hruska Memorial Library for their partnership with this venture. The work experience program was coordinated by Shane Buresh and Stephanie Wagle of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Audrey Graves and Leslie Wagner of NCECBVI.
Every year the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) invites artists who are blind or visually impaired of all ages to submit artwork to APH InSights. This art competition and exhibition draws entries from across the U.S. and around the world.

The exhibition is shown in Louisville, Kentucky and also worldwide on APH’s website. Works in the exhibition are selected from entries submitted for jurying. Award winners are selected from the juried exhibition on the basis of originality of concept, expressive use of media, and artistic excellence. The judges are professionals in the art gallery/art museum field, art educators, and/or a practicing artists.

All entrants to APH InSights received a letter of appreciation and a certificate. Award winners receive a cash award and a ribbon. They are also invited to come to Louisville to receive their awards at the fall meeting.

The 2016 APH InSights Art Competition had nearly 300 entries and 80 were selected to be in the art exhibit. The Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired was well represented with three works of art being selected for the show, one of which was chosen as the 3rd place recipient in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade category, and another was chosen as the 1st place recipient in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade category.

Eli Shaw’s artwork named “Gray Matter” was selected to be in the APH Art InSights Art Exhibition. His artwork was made using cardboard, hot glue, aluminum foil, and black shoe polish. Eli stated that he liked using the aluminum foil in his artwork. It was purchased by the American Printing House for the Blind. Eli Shaw lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Emily Kozisek’s artwork placed 3rd in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade category. The title of her artwork is “Starfish.” Emily’s artwork was created using non-latex gloves, plastic bean bag beads, and a wood and Styrofoam base. It was purchased by Olaya Landa-Vialard and will be on display at the Illinois State University College of Education Special Education Office. Emily lives in David City, Nebraska.

Joesf Brott’s artwork placed 1st in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade category. The title of his artwork is “Metal Pipes.” Joesf used a variety of plumbing piping of different thickness and lengths, along with a metal ring to hang the pipes on, wire, metal film canisters, and metal/magnet squares. Joesf chose not to sell his artwork so he could keep it in his home. Joesf lives in Crawford, Nebraska.

Emily and her parents, along with Joesf and his grandmother, had the opportunity to attend the APH Art InSights Awards Ceremony in Louisville, Kentucky. Emily said her favorite part of the week was standing by her artwork during the “meet the artist” portion of the evening, getting her 3rd place ribbon, and selling her artwork to Olaya. She also liked eating at different restaurants and experienced her first plane ride. Joesf said the favorite part of his week was the art show because he got to eat in the meeting room. He also enjoyed the plane ride and shared that it was cloudy and bumpy.
Welcome New Students!

NCECBVI welcomed five new students to our center-based and/or residential program. We are excited to welcome Nathan Kahler, Joy Riley, Skye Shipley-Parris, Trenton Torres, and Gavin Webster!

Nathan Kahler is a 4th grade student who comes to us from Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca Public Schools. He is a day student who arrives each day with a smile and a laugh while reaching out for a hug. Some of his favorite things include music, toys that light up, and remote control cars. In his free time, Nathan likes to play around and give hugs.

Joy Riley is a senior in our 18-21 program. She comes to us from Red Cloud Public Schools. Joy loves to dance, sing, watch movies, and go to church. Joy also loves popcorn, pizza, yogurt, and coffee. In her free time, she likes to go swimming. While at NCECBVI she loves to sit in the rocking chair and participate in music class.

Skye Shipley-Parris is not completely new to us, but is new to being a full-time student at NCECBVI. The last couple of years she came to us on a part-time basis.

Trenton Torres is in kindergarten and comes to NCECBVI three days a week from Plattsmouth Public Schools. The other two days he attends Plattsmouth Public Schools. Trenton’s all-time favorite foods include yogurt and ice milk. Trenton loves music, playing with a spin wheel on a toy, listening to the boom box, playing with the iPad, swinging, and being outside.

Gavin Webster is a 3rd grade student who comes to us from Westside Public Schools. He loves his family, especially his grandpa “papa.” Gavin also loves car rides, country music, and swinging outside. In his free time, he likes to go swimming and especially loves the Children’s Museum. Gavin would love for all of his meals to me pizza, tacos, and chocolate milk.

American Printing House for the Blind Matt Connect: Smart Tablet-Based Magnifier

downward so student view and read a worksheet or book while the second is a wireless camera used for distance viewing with up to 40x magnification. It can look at a whiteboard or Smart Board across a room.

The MATT Connect also uses the internet to read books on Bookshare or any website that has been designed to work with mobile devices. It comes with a stand to hold everything for easy viewing and it has a very nice bag for storage and travel.

As with any device with this many features for individuals who are visually impaired, it will take some time to set up and learn the features. It does have a well-written instruction book and set up guide to help a new user make the best use of the Matt Connect.
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.