



NEVADA'S PROTECTION & ADVOCACY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Town Hall Meeting Summary Report 2014

A Discussion of Services Needed by Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Since the last Nevada Legislative session, ongoing discussions have focused on how to determine and address the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired to help them maintain their independence in communities throughout our State. A Town Hall meeting strategy was developed and implemented in order to provide a forum in which individuals who are blind or visually impaired could voice their concerns. The focus of these Town Hall meetings was to determine what services and supports exist in communities as well as what service and support gaps occur for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Town Hall meetings were hosted in partnership with the State of Nevada Aging & Disability Services Division; the State of Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation; the Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living; and NDALC. Town Hall meetings were held throughout Nevada in order to learn about residents' concerns living in urban as well as rural Nevada. Elko was the first community to host Town Hall meetings on August 21. Town Hall meetings were subsequently held in Sparks on September 12, at the Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living. The final round of Town Hall meetings was held in Las Vegas at the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation on September 24, and at the American Legion on September 26. A Town Hall Meeting was hosted by conference call on October 8. Town Hall meetings were scheduled in the morning and in the afternoon in each venue to provide greater opportunity for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, their families, advocates, and friends; service providers; and all other interested community members to attend. Mr. Jack Mayes, Executive Director of the Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center (NDALC), facilitated all the Town Hall Meetings, except those held at the American Legion and the Nevada State Department of Employment and Training where a NDALC Rights Advocate facilitated the meetings.

The Town Hall partners created program flyers to inform consumers of the upcoming Town Hall meetings and conducted outreach to related consumer support groups and organizations. The Town Hall meetings held in Elko were attended by 34 consumers and agency representatives; 37 attended the Town Hall Meetings held in Sparks at the Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, followed by two telephone interviews with consumers who were unable to attend these meetings; and another 30 attended the Town Hall meetings at the American Legion and the Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation in Las Vegas. The Town Hall meeting held by conference call on October 8, had seven participants. Overall, a total of 108

attended the Town Hall meetings. Town Hall meeting attendees were invited to submit any additional comments to the NDALC by October 17, for inclusion in the NDALC Town Hall Meeting Summary Report 2014 (Summary Report).

Town Hall meetings were attended by representatives from federal, state and local agencies as well as from community-based organizations. Representatives from the public sector included: the Regional Representative from Senator Harry Reid's Northern Nevada Office; the State of Nevada, Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Administrative Division; the Bureaus of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and Vocational Rehabilitation; the Aging and Disability Services Division; and the Aging and Disability Resource Center program; and representatives from the school districts of Carson City, Clark County, and Elko County. Parents of children attending public schools participated across the State.

Numerous community-based organizations were represented: Blind Connect; Blind Veterans; Care Chest of Sierra Nevada; City Care City Transport (board member); Consumer Direct; Crisis Call Center; Easter Seals Nevada; Eye Clinic of Las Vegas; Gentiva; Goodwill Industries; Mobility Technology Workshop; More to Life; National Federation of the Blind; Nevada Council of the Blind; Nevada Early Intervention Services; Nevada PEP; Nevada Talk and Book; Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living; Southern Nevada Center for Independent Living; United Cerebral Palsy of Nevada; Wells Family Resource Center; and Vision Rahab Services.

This Summary Report reflects the key points shared by attendees at the Town Hall meeting convened in each geographic area, plus the follow-up personal interviews, by consumer service area (note: these services are not listed in any order of priority): Orientation and Mobility Training (O&M Training); Assistive Technology (AT); Transportation; Life Skills; Education; Employment; Consumer Service Outreach; and Miscellaneous Concerns. Key points were often voiced at more than one Town Hall meeting and, as a result, key points are often listed more than once. Rather than compress the interim report results, this Summary Report reflects where the key points were voiced to enable the reader to understand the scope of the shared concern throughout the State. Understandably, Town Hall meeting attendees focused more on some consumer services than others at different Town Hall meetings held throughout the State.

A review of the Summary Report indicates that there are five key areas of concern among individuals who are blind or visually impaired, their families, friends, advocates, and service providers.

- 1) A persistent lack of consumer awareness exists as to what services are available and how to access services when a need arises. This lack of consumer awareness was found to exist across all consumer service areas: O&M Training, AT, Transportation, Life Skills, Education, and Employment. Expanded Consumer Service Outreach is needed; however,

it will only be beneficial if outreach strategies are in accessible formats to the affected consumer groups.

- 2) The lack of O&M Training for the so-called “gap population”, ages 22 to 55 who are not pursuing a vocational outcome, inhibits a consumer’s ability to learn how to navigate their home and social environments. Rather than receive formal training they are left to learn these skills on their own or to rely on others to help manage their daily tasks. This hampers consumers’ ability to learn how to adapt to their new physical challenges; which, more often than not, impacts their long-term success to become independent. This issue is compounded by the fact that there is a lack of trained O&M Training professionals in Nevada, particularly in rural Nevada.
- 3) Even where consumers know which AT device would best meet their needs, many lack the financial resources to purchase the desired technology. To complicate matters, training is typically not included with the purchase of an AT device. And, even when the provision of AT devices is provided at no cost to a consumer, invariably the service provider does not have sufficient resources to fully train the consumer in the use and features of the AT device.

Students should be able to access AT devices to complete homework or other tasks away from the school site, plus they should be able to take their AT device with them when they transition from high school to work and/or post-secondary education. Such policies are not consistent across school districts in the State.

- 4) Paratransit service areas need to be expanded in order to better serve the transportation needs of consumers to enable them to lead fuller, productive lives. Paratransit systems should consider partnering with neighboring paratransit systems to develop a “seamless” system between jurisdictions.
- 5) Consumers feel “at-risk” as pedestrians on Nevada’s streets and sidewalks. Drivers seem to be unaware that they need to use additional caution when a pedestrian with a white cane is using a crosswalk; likewise, they feel a similar frustration when using our cities’ sidewalks.

In addition to this Summary Report, the NDALC prepared interim reports summarizing the key points from each Town Hall meeting convened. NDALC chose not to include these interim reports as part of this Summary Report because it is inclusive of the comments shared in the earlier interim reports. Should you want to review the interim reports, please contact Laura Dickey at laura@ndalc.org or 775.333.7878. For privacy considerations, the attendance rosters will not be provided.

ORIENTATION & MOBILITY TRAINING (O&M Training)

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ O&M Training is limited in the rural communities: Elko County School District and Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI) rely upon Kevin Hull of Vision Rehab Services for such services. There is an expected loss of this service when Mr. Hull retires in 3-4 years. BSBVI does not have a position dedicated to O&M Training in the rural areas and cannot rely on services being provided by the Reno BSBVI office. Reno only has adequate staff coverage to serve the urban area; there is not enough staff to also serve the rural areas. Orientation and mobility educational programs are limited throughout the nation; it was estimated that the number of such programs is less than 12 nationally.
- ❖ Recommendation was made to afford individuals with disabilities the ability to go out of state to obtain the necessary O&M Training with funding through the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and/or to create an O&M Training program in Nevada. BSBVI needs to add a staff position in rural Nevada for an O&M Training specialist.
- ❖ Mobility issues were cited with curbs, stairs, and sidewalks.
- ❖ Depth perception issues create mobility challenges. Some individuals with depth perception issues expressed a need for training to learn how to safely access stairs, curbs, and basic mobility coordination. They have learned by doing rather than formal training.
- ❖ Home modifications – an older resident with a visual impairment was unaware of a home modification program available through BSBVI to assist with minor home alterations to accommodate individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

ORIENTATION & MOBILITY TRAINING

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ Some individuals who are blind or visually impaired reported they taught themselves how to navigate their surroundings.
- ❖ Some individuals who were blind reported that they were discouraged from learning Braille; they viewed this as a major hindrance to their learning and development.
- ❖ Lack of vision instructors and transcribers; few vision professionals are available.
- ❖ Lack of awareness among some individuals who are blind or visually impaired about the range of services available.
- ❖ Services are available through BSBVI if there is an employment outcome; no services are available to those individuals who are blind or visually impaired when they are not seeking an employment outcome and fall between the ages of 22 and 55, the so-called “gap population”.
- ❖ Recommended that a priority should be established to provide funding for staff and services to those individuals who are blind or visually impaired who are not seeking employment and are between the ages of 22 and 55.

- ❖ BVR/BSBVI would like to see funding to provide services to the “gap population” between the ages of 22 and 55. It is unclear who the funding would be awarded to.
- ❖ The infrastructure of cities in urban and rural Nevada presents mobility barriers for those who are blind or visually impaired. If consumers were more vocal about their needs, it is felt that more jurisdictions would respond by providing accommodations to public rights of way by reducing or eliminating obstacles found in the paths of travel.
- ❖ A consumer who was blind commented at the Town Hall meeting in Sparks that she had to relocate from Pahrump to northern Nevada to reside with family because there were no services available in Pahrump to assist her with her blindness. She stressed the lack of services crossed all consumer service areas: transportation, orientation and mobility training, life skills training, and access to assistive technology and training to learn how to use assistive technology devices.

ORIENTATION & MOBILITY TRAINING

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ Blind Connect reported that a consumer was unable to obtain O&M Training because he wasn't able to return to work; however, he was able to obtain assistance from the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to learn how to use the bus service and to navigate the bus routes.
- ❖ O&M Training is available through BVR/BSBVI for only those individuals pursuing an employment objective; the so-called “gap population” is unable to receive the life skills services needed to learn how to live with blindness or a visual impairment.
- ❖ Funds should be made available to expand O&M and life skills training to the gap population.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ BSBVI (Faith Wilson) and Kevin Hull complete in-home assessments for clients of the State BSBVI program.
- ❖ Funding for assistive technology is agency-based; if an individual is blind or visually impaired falls within the gap ages of 22 to 55 assistive technology cannot be funded through an agency unless the individual is actively pursuing employment; if the individual is over 55 services are available through BSBVI through the Older Blind program, which is focused on diverting institutionalization and fostering independence, not vocationally motivated.
- ❖ Uniformity between school districts is needed to provide assistive technology devices to students who are transitioning to work and/or post-secondary education.

- ❖ Recommendation was made to have AT devices available for students to take home to use with homework, on school breaks, or between semesters to maintain knowledge base. Most AT devices follow Elko students but each school district sets its own policies.
- ❖ BVR/BSBVI can partner with schools as long as there is a goal of employment.
- ❖ Recommendation was made to establish funding to ensure the continued provision of AT devices to assist students who do not apply to BVR/BSBVI in their transition to work and/or post-secondary education. (Note: BVR/BSBVI have funding for AT for clients transitioning from high school to higher education/employment). The student must be a BVR/BSBVI client.
- ❖ Low vision specialists are needed. Important to remember that while resources are limited in Elko County, they are even more limited outside of Elko in rural Nevada. Only one teacher is trained to instruct students who are blind or visually impaired for all of rural Nevada.
- ❖ Internet access is available only Monday through Friday.
- ❖ No one in the area is qualified to conduct evaluations for AT devices and train the individual with a disability in the use of the AT. When necessary, BVR/BSBVI must bring in professionals from other cities at greater expense and, often times, vendors are unwilling to travel to rural Nevada.
- ❖ Concerns about XP transition with the older population and the potential risk of identity theft if the user does not convert from XP to a supported operating system.
- ❖ Lack of services and service providers exists even with the phenomenal growth in rural Nevada. Funding for services has not kept pace with population growth.
- ❖ Lack of a solid technological infrastructure results in increased road miles to deliver services; “road time” is unproductive time.
- ❖ Some consumers expressed they did not need assistance with AT devices and/or training; two consumers disclosed they had late on-set blindness and another was a client at a work center (formerly known as “sheltered workshops”). (Note: this perspective was not shared by the majority of consumers who attended the Town Hall meetings.)

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ Funds are not available to stay current with the ever-changing technology, software, and operating systems.
- ❖ Likewise, funding is not available for training on how to use AT devices and programs. You can generally obtain equipment but then there are no funds – or limited funding – to train the consumer on how to operate equipment or use a specific program.
- ❖ iPads and notebooks are excellent resources for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Apps are available to assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including: point of sale, debit cards, money readers, color apps, etc. Many of these apps

are free or at a nominal cost. Consumers were encouraged to use smart technology devices to gain greater independence.

- ❖ IPads are viewed as AT devices by BVR and BSBVI.
- ❖ Greater outreach and training resources are needed to inform individuals who are blind or visually impaired of the varied resources available and how to use them.
- ❖ Resources should be restored to the so-called “gap population” – those ages 22 through 55 – to provide resources to assist them.
- ❖ The BSBVI refers individuals who are blind or visually impaired to Care Chest of Sierra Nevada (CCSN) for services in its independent living program should consumers fall within the so-called “gap group”. Consumers are referred to Rage in southern Nevada for similar services. Currently, CCSN has a waiting list of approximately one and one-half years for its independent living program. CCSN feels BSBVI is better equipped to provide services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. BSBVI has trained professional staff that can provide the needed services to improve the quality of life for consumers. Although, it is understood that BSBVI is a vocationally motivated program and can only provide services to individuals under 55 who are seeking employment. The CCSN delay in providing services, particularly mobility cane training, regrettably, results in consumers having to “get by” by attempting to navigate city streets on their own, potentially putting them and/or others at-risk, relying on friends or family members, or not venturing out; all outcomes that result in the lack of independence for consumers when they are learning to adapt to their new life challenges.
- ❖ Suggested that a smart phone recycling program could be of value to individuals who are blind or visually impaired because they are good screen reading devices and have a variety of apps that can improve the quality of life.
- ❖ How do we better educate end users regarding the access availability through smart technology (i.e., iPad, iPhone, etc.)?
- ❖ The Mobility Technology Workshop (formerly the IOS Academy) is held at Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living each Thursday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. to educate consumers on how to use apps and features of smart devices.
- ❖ Free AT devices are difficult to obtain when an employment objective is not the intended outcome.
- ❖ Eyeglasses, while important, are not the priority for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This having been said, the attendees felt that the expansion of an eyeglass recycling program would be of value to low-income seniors. A consumer from Lyon County indicated that he needed help with special eyeglasses for his optic neuritis; costs for such eyeglasses run \$400 to \$500. Although Lions Club has a robust eyeglass recycling program, more often than not, the collected eyeglasses are shipped overseas. Rather than focusing on eyeglasses, the consumers reported that the focus should be on AT devices and training for individuals who are blind or visually impaired because this priority will improve their overall quality of life.

- ❖ Schools are not teaching Braille.
- ❖ Waiting until the age of 55 to learn Braille impacts the ability for individuals who are blind or visually impaired who fall within the “gap population” to adjust to their vision loss and compromises the quality of life they can achieve.
- ❖ Braille is the “blind person’s equivalent to the printed word” and the primary method by which he/she learns to read. Learning Braille should never be placed “on-hold” because a consumer falls within the “gap population”.
- ❖ Optical character recognition is an excellent accommodation; however, the cost is beyond the reach of many consumers.
 - For example, the Freedom Scientific Open Book is costly: \$1,200 for the software and \$800 for the scanner.
 - There are optical character recognition apps available on the Apple and Android platforms for a fraction of the cost.
- ❖ Information regarding assistive technology devices has been limited because of the cost to educate/inform the consumer about the range of devices/services available.
- ❖ Good, up-to-date information needs to be available to consumers, advocates, educational institutions, family members, etc. It is challenging to keep information current because technology is ever-changing in the industry. On the one hand, this is positive because better devices continue to improve the quality of life; yet, to keep information current and to conduct effective outreach service providers are forever pursuing a “moving target”. This makes it difficult for service providers to provide the most current AT device and up-to-date training because they are constantly re-training.
- ❖ Training is consistently underfunded because it is not understood by policy makers.
- ❖ Consumers reported that they have been discouraged to learn Braille.
- ❖ “Smart” devices are changing the landscape; smart devices are the means by which individuals who are blind or visually impaired are able to access the “Modern Life Highway”.
- ❖ Universal access needs to be patterned after what was previously available with telephone land lines.
- ❖ Students need to be able to take home AT devices.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ Inadequate training is available for AT devices.
- ❖ AT training is currently limited to 30 days; no on-going training is available.
- ❖ Consumers are unfamiliar with the agencies and/or organizations that can provide AT devices and how to connect with them.
- ❖ Consumers reported problems with obtaining funding to purchase an AT device unless they could demonstrate a vocational objective.

- ❖ While programs are available, the blind and visually impaired community may not be aware of the programs and how to use them.
- ❖ Blind Connect refers individuals who are blind or visually impaired to the resources it knows about; admittedly, it does not know all the resources that are available. It is difficult to obtain information in a timely manner and to distribute it to the affected community.
- ❖ A lack of information persists – both in printed and electronic mediums – and, regrettably, websites are often not accessible.
- ❖ A lot of websites are not accessible. There are things “in the works”, such as “Sight Ques”, being developed by A Eye Squared, that allows for magnification and speech from any website.
- ❖ An extreme need exists for accessible websites. Agencies and organizations need to be held accountable for the accessibility of their websites. If consumers are encouraged to access services using websites then it is imperative that these same websites are accessible. Continual feedback is needed to maintain accessibility of any website.
- ❖ It is difficult for consumers to apply for services when local, state and federal websites are not accessible. It was reported that State service websites are not accessible to screen readers and magnifiers. The State was encouraged to invest funding to ensure the accessibility of its agency websites.
- ❖ It was suggested that nonprofit agencies collaborate with public sector agencies to create accessible websites; leaders from State agencies, along with nonprofit organizations, need to step-up to contribute to accessible websites and to ensure that content is up-to-date.
- ❖ Federal websites often are not accessible, too.
- ❖ An updated brochure listing available resources and how to best access those resources would be beneficial.
- ❖ Individuals who are blind or visually impaired – like anyone else with new technology – need adequate training to maximize their use of AT devices. A person-centered process was recommended. A person needs to learn how to be blind and successful in his/her own home with AT devices before he/she can be successful in the community. It takes time: training should not be capped at the lowest level of service time.

TRANSPORTATION

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ Individuals who are blind or visually impaired have to frequently rely on family members, neighbors, or friends to meet their transportation needs.
- ❖ Some transportation services are unreliable and, as a result, individuals who are blind or visually impaired rely on family members, neighbors, or friends – they always have to have a “back-up” plan.
- ❖ Taxi system does not assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired with getting in and out of a taxi. Discussion followed about a mandated training program for taxi cab

drivers to train them on how to assist individuals with disabilities in getting in and out of taxis and general disability sensitivity training.

- ❖ Advance lead time required for public transportation does not lend itself to last minute appointments, changes in schedules, etc.
- ❖ Several consumers discussed the costs associated with traveling to appointments with specialists outside of the area. The delay in reimbursement for gas from BVR/BSBVI or other agencies poses a hardship for some.
- ❖ A mobility management program is coming to Elko through RSVP, contact is Mike Reynolds. Jeff Duncan with the Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD) will obtain more information about the mobility management program and report back to the group in the afternoon session regarding the Elko Mobility Management Initiative.
 - Jeff Duncan with ADSD reported back to the group about this initiative:
 - Grantee is RSVP
 - Connects existing transportation services, does not create new services
 - Projected roll-out date is in the next “couple of months”
- ❖ Individuals who are blind or visually impaired would be able to volunteer their time if transportation was more available and more reliable. Public transportation is only available from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday - Friday. These hours limit one’s ability to volunteer, attend community events, return home from work, or work alternative schedules, etc.
- ❖ Youth who are transitioning from high school to work are challenged to find transportation that can accommodate their work schedules. When youth find a job they may not be able to get to their workplaces because of lack of transportation.
- ❖ The Community Health Advocate in Wells commented that one of the major resources she provides to tribal members is transportation to and from appointments. Limited resources are available in Wells when the sole provider is not available.
- ❖ Only four cabs service Elko and neighboring areas - \$25 one-way trip to Spring Creek; \$40 one-way trip to Carlin.
- ❖ Public transportation frequently runs five to ten minutes behind schedule; users plan their trips accordingly.
- ❖ Same day service has provided all people with disabilities greater flexibility in their daily schedules.
- ❖ Buses are typically full to capacity; no fixed route buses as in other areas. Fixed route buses would expand transportation options.
- ❖ Winnemucca has no bus transportation.
- ❖ Ely has limited bus transportation.
- ❖ No transportation issues cited with transporting students with disabilities to and from school.

- ❖ Overriding theme is that transportation is a major issue for all residents in rural Nevada but particularly more challenging for individuals with disabilities and, even more so, for those who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Transportation at night is challenging because the bus service stops at 4:00 p.m. Unrealistic for those holding a 9-5 job, or working 3rd or 4th shifts.
- ❖ Rely on friends, family, neighbors, and, sometimes, the taxi service.
- ❖ Call-in service – Get My Ride – is a valued service.
- ❖ Would like to attend community events after dark but am unable to do so because of the 4:00 p.m. ending time of the bus service. Unfairly limits the ability of the disabled community to participate in civic events.
- ❖ Would like to attend government meetings; again, they are held in the evening hours.

TRANSPORTATION

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ No bus system is available in Pahrump.
- ❖ Bus drivers do not consistently announce bus stops. When asked, some bus drivers will announce the bus stop but not all bus drivers are willing to comply with such requests. Sometimes bus stops are announced too late to afford the necessary time for an individual with a disability to disembark at the stop and, if he/she stops at the next stop, it can result in the consumer becoming lost. Some consumers shared stories of becoming disoriented, lost, and fearful as a result of disembarking at the wrong bus stop. The automated system that announces bus stops does not always work; furthermore, it can be manually turned off by the bus driver. If subsequently turned on, the automated system does not accurately announce the bus stops.
- ❖ Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) needs to hold drivers accountable:
 - Sensitivity training
 - Service animal policy
 - Provide training on how to serve the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
 - Is certification required? What are the licensing requirements for bus drivers?
 - Emphasis now is primarily on safety.
- ❖ The fares for RTC Access rides are considerable for individuals with disabilities living on fixed incomes: costs are \$3.00 for a one-way fare and \$6.00 for a round trip fare.
- ❖ Taxi companies need to provide sensitivity training to their drivers.
- ❖ RTC website is not accessible to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Consumers reported long travel times; it took upwards of two and one-half hours on a RTC Ride for a trip that would only take 10 minutes on RTC Access.
- ❖ Urged to expand bus service from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. to provide individuals who are blind or visually impaired with the same or similar opportunities to participate in more activities of daily living: government meetings, theater performances, work schedule

flexibility, etc. Typically, consumers can rely upon public transportation to transport them to an event; yet, they report that they must find an alternative transportation mode for the return trip because of the limited bus schedules.

- ❖ Sidewalks are in “shambles” in the city of Reno.
- ❖ A consumer reported using casino airport shuttles to travel to the Reno Tahoe International Airport when other forms of bus service were not available.
- ❖ Consumers reported that the five day advance notice requirement to use Logisticare, the transportation bus service provided by Medicaid, is unreasonable. It was pointed out that in an emergency this notice requirement can be waived. Expanded access to Logisticare would enable consumers to make and/or keep appointments outside of the area. At the present time only those who are on full Medicaid are eligible to use Logisticare services.
- ❖ Taxi service is limited in rural Nevada.
- ❖ Douglas Area Rural Transportation (DART) does not go to Carson City.
- ❖ Urged to link bus routes between jurisdictions so bus service is seamless. Consumers reported challenges in getting to bus stops. Also, bus drivers do not always announce upcoming bus stops.
- ❖ The growth of the Truckee Meadows Community College campus has resulted in a confusing numbering system for the bus stops on its main campus. Students reported that they did not always know where they were to be picked up on the main campus.
- ❖ The geographical area serviced by RTC Access, the paratransit system, should be expanded to include the outlying areas. The non-ADA service area includes a pent-up demand for transportation services from individuals with disabilities.
- ❖ A commuter network was recommended to include rail and bus, similar to that found in larger urban areas.
- ❖ In Lyon County the paratransit system travels to Carson City and Reno only one day every other month. This schedule limits the access of consumers to specialists who are not available within these narrow time frames.
- ❖ Bus transportation routes are inadequate to accommodate the transportation needs of consumers.
 - Douglas Area Rural Transportation (DART) is only available Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. And, importantly, access is even limited during scheduled service hours.
 - Caregivers are not allowed to transport their clients because of liability concerns.
- ❖ Attendance at public hearings held by RTC was strongly encouraged to influence future decision making regarding the RTC Paratransit Plan.

TRANSPORTATION

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ Insufficient audio count at street intersections; audio count does not allow sufficient time to afford individuals with disabilities an opportunity to safely cross intersections.
- ❖ Drivers are unaware of the need to use additional caution when encountering pedestrians who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ A comment was made that there was “no paratransit available in Reno, NV”. (Note: This statement is incorrect; whether the paratransit coverage area should be expanded is a separate question.)
- ❖ Blind Connect reported that a consumer was unable to obtain O&M Training because he wasn’t able to return to work; however, he was able to obtain assistance from the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to learn how to use the bus service and to navigate the bus routes.
- ❖ Silver Rider has increased rides and is branching out in order to expand its service area.
- ❖ Concerns persist regarding the paratransit systems limited service area.
- ❖ No bus services are available in the Blue Diamond area.

LIFE SKILLS

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ Lack of occupational therapists and other professionals in rural Nevada poses challenges to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. It was noted that shortages exist elsewhere across the country, too.
- ❖ No supports, other than Social Security when eligible, are available for the “older” population in their 30s and 40s who do not choose to return to work and have a visual impairment. Individuals with visual impairments who are older than 22 and younger than 55 are only eligible to receive BSBVI services if they are actively pursuing employment. Older Blind services are available for individuals who are blind or visually impaired at the age of 55 or older. Bridge services are needed for this growing “gap” population of individuals between the ages of 22 and 55 who are not vocationally motivated, yet require assistance for independent living.
- ❖ Need to educate the doctors and other attending professionals about the services available through BVR/BSBVI.
- ❖ PACE coalition is a good resource in Elko and rural Nevada.
- ❖ Regional planning group meets quarterly to share information about resources; this group has been key to promoting awareness of the services available.
- ❖ Care-giver “back-up” plans:
 - Always in the back of their minds, if “so and so” cannot help, who can?
 - Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living frequently receives calls inquiring about resources for “back-up” care and respite care.

- Not enough caregivers to meet the growing needs. People have increased employment options in the improved economy. Pay is not commensurate with the job responsibilities for caregivers; hence, they have sought better paying jobs with the improved economic environment.
- ❖ Aging and Disability Resource Center is located in the Wells Fargo Bank in Elko and serves rural Nevada. Ivan Espinoza manages this program.
- ❖ Adaptive bowling, accessible playgrounds, and adaptive swimming classes are available.
- ❖ The Special Olympics program is available.
- ❖ Cell phone discounts for individuals with disabilities are not recognized by the local cell phone providers.
- ❖ Recommendation was made to explore partnership agreements with cell providers to make the discounted service available to individuals with disabilities.
- ❖ Support groups for individuals with disabilities are limited.
- ❖ Recommendation made to identify a support group coordinator to plan, organize and oversee support group initiatives in rural Nevada.
- ❖ A gap in services exists for those with different economic resources.
- ❖ No formal life skills training available for those in the “gap ages of 22-55”

LIFE SKILLS

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ Apps are available to assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired with how to navigate kitchen environments to perform daily food preparation tasks. Some consumers reported that they taught themselves ways to manage food preparation tasks. Puff paint applications were recommended on stove tops to indicate where the knobs were set in the on/off position or at a certain temperature.
- ❖ Barriers include sidewalks, shrubs, garbage cans, telephone poles, tree roots, etc.; such obstacles are frequently encountered on paths of travel.
- ❖ Methods were suggested on how to organize home or work areas to facilitate identification, ease of use, and increase safety and productivity.
- ❖ Consumers reported difficulties opening and reading their correspondence; some relied on neighbors and family members. Apps are available to assist with these tasks.

LIFE SKILLS

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ A companion program was suggested for homebound persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Need to develop a peer to peer mentoring program.

- ❖ A large need exists for life skills training to help individuals who are blind or visually impaired to become successful in life – a more systemic approach is needed, including more teachers to provide life skills instruction.
- ❖ One has to “learn (how) to be blind – home skills, cooking skills, shopping skills, Braille and O&M Training – then after all that – you have to feel comfortable before you can think of anything past daily survival.
- ❖ Peer to peer training needs to be developed to provide life skills and O&M Training because such training is only available through the BSBVI if the individual who is blind or visually impaired is seeking a vocational outcome.
- ❖ Life skills training for the home setting is needed for individuals who are blind or visually impaired that fall within the “gap years” in Las Vegas.
- ❖ BSBVI begins working with students in their junior year in high school to provide life skills training.

EDUCATION

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ A parent commented that she chose not to pursue BVR/BSBVI services for her child with vision impairment because she was told BVR/BSBVI could only assist with a Bachelor’s degree; thereafter, a student is expected to pursue employment. Her child’s career goal was to become a history teacher/professor requiring a Ph.D. A discussion followed that BVR/BSBVI can, in fact, provide extended services to support a student with a career goal requiring graduate degrees and that this individual was unfortunately misinformed.
- ❖ Clear communication is needed to ensure BVR/BSBVI clients are informed of their options through BVR/BSBVI.

EDUCATION

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ On-line classes through UNR are not accessible.
 - Student was informed that she needed to purchase a laptop with Blackboard Mobile in order to take on-line classes.
 - Student was informed that because of the delay in obtaining the needed AT she could take an incomplete and re-take the class.
 - She asked, “Why cannot I be like my classmates?”
- ❖ AT devices do not follow the students; schools need to adapt, not the students.
- ❖ The Teach Act HR 3505 is a bill before the House of Representatives that would standardize college curriculum. The pros and cons of this bill were discussed at length. Professors do not support this legislation because it would curtail their academic freedoms. Individuals with disabilities think this legislation would help them with their college studies because more curricula would be available in accessible formats.

EDUCATION

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ A parent of a student voiced her concern that there are no schools for students who are blind in Nevada. The parent did not feel her son was receiving an appropriate level of instruction in the regular school because his teacher had not been trained on how to instruct a student who is blind. The parent further commented that the school did not provide the appropriate AT devices; nor did it have appropriate signage posted in the parking area warning drivers that a blind student attended the school.

EMPLOYMENT

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ Job developers need to be trained regarding issues that persons who are blind or visually impaired encounter in the workplace.
- ❖ More job coaches are needed to provide supports for persons who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Employers need to be informed about the skills and abilities of persons who are blind or visually impaired and how to accommodate them to enable them to successfully perform their job functions.
- ❖ Need to educate the public and employers that people are “blind not broken”.
- ❖ The approach needs to be one of a “positive, can do attitude” – to bring about change.
- ❖ Need to educate employers about “blind hires”.

Note: The Las Vegas Town Hall Meetings were the only meetings in which employment issues were discussed.

CONSUMER SERVICE OUTREACH: Promoting awareness and knowledge of consumer services available

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ Several persons were not aware of available resources.
- ❖ No matter what outreach methods are used, you cannot reach everyone.
- ❖ Service outreach at Owyhee resulted in eight to ten new clients.
- ❖ Senior Center Newsletter, local newspapers, and PSAs were suggested as good mediums by which to reach consumers.

CONSUMER SERVICE OUTREACH: Promoting awareness and knowledge of consumer services available

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ Consumers need to be informed of the resources available.
- ❖ A resource directory of services, assistive technology devices, etc. is desired.
- ❖ The Silver Standard is a newsletter that is published by Douglas County Senior Services. The newsletter welcomes articles, notices of activities or events, etc. To submit an article contacts the editor at: editor@gmail.com.
- ❖ National Federation of the Blind offered to assist with translating brochures, booklets, etc. into Braille.

CONSUMER SERVICE OUTREACH: Promoting awareness and knowledge of consumer services available

American Legion, Nevada State Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, and Clark County Conference Call, Town Hall Meetings, Las Vegas, Nevada

- ❖ A community resource guide should be developed in all accessible formats to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability.
- ❖ On-going community education and awareness about what it means to be blind or have a visual impairment is needed. Additionally, community education needs to take place to inform others about the skills, abilities, and potential needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ State agencies were urged to standardize forms to streamline the benefit application process.
- ❖ Accessible websites, flyers, and other electronic and printed media.
- ❖ Informational networks need to be established to assist with informing affected groups about services, products, upcoming events, new trends, etc.
- ❖ The concept of a “one-stop” comprehensive informational source was strongly encouraged.

MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS

Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, Elko, Nevada

- ❖ Lack of affordable housing is a challenge for all residents in the area and compounded for individuals with disabilities requiring affordable *as well as* accessible housing because it is not available in Elko.
- ❖ Consumers expressed frustration with the lack of services in the area and the costs associated with traveling to other areas for specialized treatment.
- ❖ Consumers noted not all medical care providers took all types of insurance.
- ❖ The 75 and older demographic is relocating to Nevada, more than any other state; yet, services have not been expanded to meet the needs of this growing demographic.

- ❖ The Lions Club is a resource for assistance with costs associated with cataract surgery.
- ❖ Individuals who have late on-set blindness or visual impairments may not be ready to accept their new limitations. Balancing the desire to remain independent without supports is important to many.

MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS

Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, Sparks, Nevada

- ❖ Need for on-going O&M Training.
- ❖ Need funding to create, expand and sustain support groups that focus on the needs and priorities of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Younger generations do not know what a white cane symbolizes; thereby, creating safety risks for individuals who are blind or visually impaired in navigating sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.
- ❖ Digital controls present unique issues for those who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Desire to see an accessible television developed.
- ❖ Education needed for white cane usage.
- ❖ Universal design remains the ideal.
- ❖ Sensitivity training is needed to provide better customer service to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- ❖ Suggested that an easier, more consistent way to navigate websites should be developed.
- ❖ Aisles are too narrow in many shopping venues for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to easily navigate. It was suggested that using a smaller grocery cart is easier for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to navigate narrow store aisles.
- ❖ Product demonstration sites in shopping centers also inhibit the ability of individuals who are blind or visually impaired to navigate store aisles.
- ❖ The small concrete ridge along the outer edge of sidewalks in Japan enhances the ability of individuals who are blind or visually impaired to navigate city sidewalks in Tokyo.
- ❖ Agencies do not “share” information, present options or choices available to consumers; thereby, creating service silos that do not communicate and a service landscape that is difficult for consumers to navigate.
- ❖ State of Nevada needs to fund continuing education units (CEUs) to enable professionals to retain licensure and/or certifications.
- ❖ The need for universal design was stressed.
- ❖ Consumers who are slightly over the income eligibility guidelines for full Medicaid coverage find themselves struggling to make co-payments, cover transportation costs, and other expenses. These expenses have led to additional stress for those with chronic conditions, such as those with MS who have experienced vision loss. The State should make an effort to expand full Medicaid coverage to more individuals who are blind or visually impaired and to other disability populations, too.