National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut

April 11, 2020 Board Meeting Minutes

Called to order: 11:12 AM

Roll call: Phil, Nathanael, Melissa, Josephina, Shonda, Jim, Mary, Beth, Ann, Liz, Debbie, Edward, Jasmyn, Patricia, Jim, Veronica, Robert, Marchele, Marilyn, Honorata, Daryl, Edgar, Dali, Esther

NFB Pledge

Acceptance of January minutes

Treasurer’s Report (as of April 10, 2020):

Checking Account Balance: $39,121.55

Savings Account Balance: $52,530.36

General Funds (liquid assets): $61,291.10

Restricted Funds: $30,060.81

Blackford Fund: $1,556.00, paid annual service fee of $4,750.00 in January, remaining funds could be used for outreach tables demonstrating Newsline

Cummins Fund: $9,473.91

Demarest Fund: $7,697.95, can comfortably award scholarship this year and the next, can continue to award this scholarship each year if the rate of annual donations remains stable

Higley Fund: $334.95

Bruce Woodward Scholarship Fund: $126.50

BELL Program: $3,853.02

Paul Duquette Technology Fund: $3,498.94

At-Large Chapter: $159.50

Waterbury Chapter: $202.05

Connecticut Association of Blind Students: $993.92

Connecticut Association of Guide Dog Users: $782.05

Connecticut Association of Blind Merchants: $20

Southwest Chapter: $128.19

Hartford Chapter: $0

East of the River Chapter (until March 28, 2021): $1,084.83

Central Chapter’s Cycling Challenge: $150

In summary:

* General fund balance has increased from about $21,000 to $61,000, due in large part to the reduction of office expenses and modest subsidies for the Las Vegas convention
* Fundraising income only tapered off slightly
* Should expect a short-term significant decrease in fundraising due to the COVID-19 pandemic
* Total amount of fundraising and donations over the past year is approximately $80,000
* Must raise between $15,000 and $20,000 per year in order to support subsidies for Washington Seminar and National Convention
* Provided $3,200 in Washington Seminar subsidies in 2020
* Could potentially budget between $11,000 and $16,000 to help members participate in the upcoming virtual national convention
* Money could be used to rent out meeting space for Connecticut attendees for general sessions, or aid affiliate members in obtaining technology to connect them to convention events
* BELL program will most likely cost more than the $3,800 in its restricted fund, might need anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 extra gained through specific fundraising
* State convention expenses should be similar to previous years, about $5,000, could be offset by sponsorships
* The expense of an outreach director is about $25,000 per year at the present salary, telephone, and Internet, not including rent
* If financial situation remains the same and we support our BELL Academy we would completely deplete our general fund in just over a year without any more fundraising
* Even if fundraising dries out, we will have enough money in our general fund to continue programs for at least another year

Treasurer’s report accepted

Report for Connecticut Aging and Disability Services Advisory Board: Beth

* Focus on increasing funding for independent living training
* Currently, BESB will only pay for 12 weeks at a residential training center
* Must change policy to default to 9 months of residential adjustment to blindness training
* Carroll center training is inadequate in many cases (need more formal complaints)
* Advisory Board meetings are open to the public, where those who are not members can speak during the public comment period
* Can ask to be a guest of the meeting
* Beth and Mary will submit resolution and any personal statements and resources to Lisa Tanguay
* Ask to send to the rehab counselor board and other departments as well

Discussion of Resolution to Change BESB’s Current Policy around Residential Adjustment to Blindness Training: Justin Salisbury

* Not anti-Carroll Center or pro-NFB
* Must place emphasis on personal adjustment training, attitudes, skills, and habits
* BESB’s current default amount of training time is 12 weeks
* Should instead default to what has been proven to make people successful, 9 months
* Currently, BESB only emphasizes the importance of skills
* The justification of a longer program is that the other two components, attitudes and habits, cannot be accomplished in 12 weeks, but take up to 9 months
* Must have opportunities to climb the ladder of mentorship, from mentee to mentor, taking to giving back
* Resolution contains research drawn from multiple sources, such as BESB’s policy manual, advisory board minutes, studies within the blindness field to support claims, and examinations of the reasons behind various training lengths
* NFB should hold a formal stance in order to present the issue to BESB
* Board accepted the resolution

SRC Update: Deb Reed

* 5 new members to the council
* Deb’s first meeting took place on March 25th via conference call
* Alan Gunzburg has come to the end of his second three-year term, seeking new chair
* According to Brian Sigman, there were 3 expenses since the start of the fiscal year in October: $23,666 for the CCSU survey (Conducted quarterly, ¼ of the information dedicated to the Consumer Satisfaction survey data), $24.350 for NFB Newsline, and $990 for National Council of State Agencies for the blind (NCSAB) dues
* BESB is providing virtual services to clients
* Vendors from the Business Enterprise Program have been shut down due to the pandemic
* Discussions on how to support these vendors
* Concern about lack of individual contact from BESB

BELL Academy: Honorata

* BELL academies early in the summer are being moved due to pandemic
* CT has the ability to move their program into August
* National is impressed by the number and initiative of CT volunteers
* Flyers for academy have been updated and approved by national, distributed by Lucia
* Still working on donation form, waiting for Patty Chang’s approval
* Recommendation focused on general fundraising, that fundraising contributions could be part of statewide effort
* Have access to additional materials, such as braille paper and multiple volumes of braille books
* Do not have craft materials, must purchase
* Must wait until number of students is confirmed in order to have a realistic projection of the amount of supplies needed
* 2 students have signed up for the academy already
* Letter from BESB to its clients has been postponed until next week, should be more sign ups coming
* Karen Anderson will conduct training through zoom, may not be able to hold in-person training until social distancing restrictions have been lifted
* Important to build relationships with small businesses and restaurants in local communities to support one another
* Hotel reservation funds from canceled training in March have been returned
* Could create a list of materials that could be donated instead of buying everything
* Designating responsibilities
* Prospective resources for obtaining braille materials are Library for the Blind, National Braille Press, and the Library of Congress
* Still need tactile graphic books and 7 to 10 children’s’ books
* Idea for braille drawing and tactile anatomy
* Board must make a decision to fund the BELL academy using funds that would have been used for national convention
* In a position to spend between $5,000 and $10,000 from our general fund
* Approximately $14,000 for TVI, and expenses for food, transportation, and individual financial assistance
* CT affiliate will use $5,000 from general fund for the BELL Academy, making the total fund of the BELL Academy about $8,800 at this time
* Hoping for at least 12 students in attendance, up to 20 or 22
* Hopes to rebuild and grow the academy, encourage returning students
* Close to 300 blind students in the state
* Increase number of students in the Federation

PAC Plan: Honorata

* CTABS received a shout out from President Riccobono for their contribution to the PAC Plan
* The Southern chapter has joined
* No individual updates
* Please Update Honorata if you join so she can keep track of the numbers

Dream Maker Circle: Honorata

* No new participants
* Ability to donate to the NFB through means such as a Payable upon death account, will, etc.

Federationist: Melissa

* In order to shed some positive light on this dreary spring, the next issue of the Federationist will focus on journeys to blindness
* What was it like to grow up as a blind individual? Did you lose your sight later in life? What did the adjustment process look like for you?
* What trials, tribulations, lessons, and achievements did you experience?
* Blindness is not always glamorous; share your story, the good and the bad.
* Please submit individual written or recorded stories to carne23m@mtholyoke.edu
* If you would feel more comfortable having someone else write your story, or if you need technology assistance, please call me at 860-391-9319
* Everyone should have the chance to participate

National Convention Update

* Moved to a virtual meeting
* Open to Everyone, regardless of finances or geographical disparities
* Opportunity to be creative
* Expected to have a lot more participants than ever before
* Recommendation to hold a special board meeting before the end of May to discuss what Connecticut will do to celebrate national convention in July

COVID-19 News

* National office closed, staff working from home
* Communication from national has been terrific
* Press release sent out to all governor’s about making their communication materials accessible
* Press release about making restaurants more accessible for blind Americans, adjusting drive-through and curbside services
* The concern of transportation to COVID-19 testing centers
* Healthcare rationing concerns
* Strongly advised to give relatives the phone number of other NFB members so they can serve as advocates
* Stay connected, pass on resources
* Flattening the Accessibility Curve Survey
* If you are receiving social security benefits, you will receive a $1,200 stimulus check via direct deposit or mail
* Library of the Blind of CT is still sending out books
* Electronic resources available such as Bard
* CVS prescription delivery

Connecticut State Convention:

* CT convention itself should not be effected in November
* Concerned about fundraising efforts, sponsorships, door prizes, due to the collapse of small businesses
* Vendor and sponsorship forms have been converted to accessible Google forms thanks to the generous efforts of CTABS members
* Plan to invite past vendors again this year
* Enthusiastic and creative convention committee that will meet in the next couple weeks
* Idea to create an online newsletter
* Put invites on list serve to any chapter calls with guest speakers
* Organizing more activities between lunch and dinner during convention (6 breakout sessions in total, 2 options every hour, (therapist, session for sighted friends and relatives, session for blind children, recreation room
* Something Halloween-themed during convention
* Legislative workshop or speakers
* Ideas and resources are welcome, even if you are not a member of the convention committee

Chapter Updates:

Hartford Chapter:

* Although the last chapter meeting was held in-person, April’s meeting will be held via conference call
* Kayaking meet with LL Bean in July

Central Chapter:

* Conference call at the beginning of April featuring guest speaker
* Fundraiser was canceled
* Next conference call will be on April 22nd

Waterbury chapter:

* Did not have a conference call
* Checked in with members individually

Southern chapter:

* Held a chapter conference call
* Virtual meeting on advocacy and team-building
* Helped Maryanne with house cleaning expenses

Shoreline chapter:

* Held conference call in March to check in with members
* Meeting next Saturday via conference call

Southwest Chapter:

* March check-in with members
* Weekly calls every Wednesday at 2:00 PM with guest speakers
* Last call featured a therapist

At-large chapter:

* Will be holding elections soon
* On Wednesday, April 15th at 8:00 PM, there will be a speaker talking about her experience as a blind dog owner
* Will be contacting members to talk to them about offices
* Beginning to line up speakers for the next few months

Connecticut Association of Blind Students:

* Checking in with students on an individual basis, via text and phone call
* Sending out resources specific to students in CT, as well as NABS updates, through group chats
* Held conference call at the end of March to discuss both academic and recreational resources as well as access barriers specific to the pandemic
* Plan to host a student game night via conference call at the end of April, featuring NFB trivia, ice breakers, and other fun activities

Connecticut Association of Guide Dog Users:

* One member needs mobility help
* Everyone else has dog food
* Important to Exercise and keep dogs active
* Some schools are reliable in sending out information and supporting handlers, some are not
* Point out the schools that can do more work, but commend those that already have

Miscellaneous:

* Keep chapter meeting times and days consistent if possible since they are virtual
* Elections and voting can now occur over the phone
* Make sure you are advertising meetings and gatherings
* President Riccobono offered to give each affiliate a free zoom pro account
* Ct has identified Jim and Gary as zoom coordinators
* Will get the Zoom platform up and running as soon as possible

Meeting adjourned: 2:04 PM