National Federation of the Blind Assistive Technology Trainers Division meeting

July 9, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM. After brief introductions of the room, Vice-President Coffman moved to approve the minutes as sent; Board member Portillo seconded, and the motion was approved.

Treasurer Lauridsen provided her report. As of last year, our balance was $370. We collected $135 this evening so our balance is now $405. Secretary Majerus moved to approve the report and board member portillo seconded; the motion carried.

President Fleet discussed the donations to the national funds. We had anticipated having a Zoom expense over the past year, but we have been using other organizations’ Zoom accounts. Vice-President Coffman moves that we donate $50 to each fund, White Cane, Jernigan, tenBroek, SUN. The motion was seconded by Majerus and Portillo and the motion passed.

The first presentation was a panel discussion between Erin Lauridsen of the San Francisco lighthouse and Jack Mendez, Technology Instructor at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. The topic of the panel was technology assessments. Jack discussed that the training center model is 6-9 months with tech class 1 hour per day. As additional project requirements are met, additional tech might be granted. All tech at the Center is covered, including mainstream tech, Access Technology, built-in screen readers, and stand-alone screen readers. Erin’s clients are more by-appointment as a local center. Students are 18 and over and training is provided to those who can get to the training center, once or twice a week, 1-2 hours at a sitting. Most of the students are low-income and use whatever devices they have. Some students may be recommended to the department of rehabilitation.

Assessments were next discussed. Jack Mendez stated that an assessment is much like an interview where students discuss their past experiences, interests, hobbies, education, etc. The interview is about 30-40 minutes where the instructor gets to know the student and their goals. Students often overestimate their skill level and reassessment can be important. Erin Lauridsen stated that the Lighthouse does a similar conversation. One student became angry because they did not understand the end goal; Erin later developed a questionnaire for her five trainers to use. The assessment report covers barriers to learning and what the student thinks they can commit to. It is important that the learning goals match the available devices, for example, the student has Android but wants to use Siri. At Louisiana, jack says that they discuss investing in oneself with the student; a student might have to buy their own technology and they need to evaluate their financial situation and expenses. Literacy is an important part of tech training and, at times, a literacy assessment is beneficial to determine how a student learns. It is not about “what can you read”, but “how do you get your information”. Jack pointed out that it is important to remind students about their initial goals throughout training. If goals change, how will technology affect the goal change? Jack states that he expects that if he will invest time in a student, he reminds them that he expects them to invest time and effort into the process as well. Audience members could ask questions of the panelists.

The next presentation was from Roger Benz, a Program manager from Google. He reminded the audience that there are resources for trainers and trusted testers. There are several items in the Google help center including Getting Started Videos and documentation. This can be accessed at g.co/help/accessibility. Google also has a disability support team available by phone, email, and chat, as well as Be My Eyes. Their web site is g.co/disabilitysupport. Roger reminded the audience about the remaining hours for the booth and opportunities to see presentations at the Convention. Because Google needs real user feedback, a Trusted Tester program is available. If you are interested in providing feedback to the Trusted Tester program, you can reach out to the Disability Support Team.

President Chancey Fleet next hosted a lightning round discussion on data privacy and security. She stated that it is alarming how many in the blind community still use Internet Explorer and how some do not even know what browser they use. Because of the use of Explorer, many people do not employ privacy tools or think about privacy concerns, including visual interpretation services recording their calls. There are some helpful extensions that can be run on Firefox and Chrome. They are Ad Block Plus and Privacy Badger. In her work with Data in Society, President Fleet has materials available to discuss these concepts. One of these is a crypto party where local facilitators can help people set up their tools to take advantage of this software. Although some may want a lot of extensions, it is important to understand that too many extensions can jam up a computer.

The next panel was on Structured Discovery in Technology Education, moderated by Chip Johnson and featuring Brett Boyer, Nancy Coffman, Amy Mason, and Jim Portillo. The panel covered the definition of Structured Discovery, which means teaching students how to learn. Some instructors teach technology in a similar fashion to teaching cane travel. If a student becomes too needy for information, sometimes you must walk away to allow them to figure things out. In the field, many times structure is provided and the trainer leaves meaning the student must try and figure things out. If students have cognitive issues, the concepts of structured discovery can make them more confused. Students think the instructor is all knowing, so sometimes when the instructor does not know, it is best to show this in front of the student and work on the task together.

President Fleet acknowledged the meeting was about to run over the allotted time, urging attendees to stay if they could. The last agenda item she moderated was a discussion on how the division could support trainers or members of the Federation in tech education. Board member Amy Mason stated that it would be helpful to provide scaffolding to allow members to hold events locally. This might include meetings for trainers to be trained, or resource sharing. Secretary Majerus stated that providing train the trainers activities are more fruitful because then new trainers can support existing members. Vice President Coffman stated that we should find ways to support TVI’s because they have little support with technology.

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Wes Majerus

NFB Trainers Division Secretary