

# SenseAbilities

A Quarterly Publication about Visual Impairments and Deafblindness for Families and Professionals

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The "Believe" and "Great Expectations" team leadership initiatives provide intensive training to selected educational teams as they work to become leaders in providing services to students with visual and multiple impairments, including deafblindness. Read more about it in Effective Practices, beginning on page 21.

A collaborative effort of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
and the DARS Division for Blind Services

## It Takes Two to Tango

By Tammy Durrett (Mom and CTVI, Tammy.durrett@gmail.com and Taylor Durrett (Daughter, Student and “Teacher”, tactiletaylor@gmail.com

*Abstract: A mom of a child with a visual impairment shares their family story. She describes the emotional time of diagnosis and the important role that early intervention services played in her daughter's development. Partnering with the educational team and accessing the unique resources available to families of blind children helped give her daughter the independence she needed to become a typical teen.*

*Keywords: family wisdom, visually impaired, expanded core curriculum, parenting*

Hello, my name is Tammy Durrett and this story is about my lovely daughter, Taylor. This story is a summary of the journey we have been on as we move towards Taylor's graduation from High School. I lay claim to a few titles including wife (almost 18 years), Educator (12 years) and most importantly mother to 3 wonderful children. My daughter Taylor, 16 years old, and two sons—Mason, 9 years old and Nolan, 3 years old.

Recently I had the privilege to participate in a Family Leadership series where I was blessed to have met so many wonderful families who shared so much of themselves in telling the stories of where “their journey” begins with their children with visual impairments. Ironically up until this most recent experience I have simply let my story just be and by doing so not didn't allow myself to embrace the beauty of my story realizing that we ALL have a story to tell.

Our story goes like this... My pregnancy was very uneventful and what most would call a “normal” pregnancy. My husband and I waited anxiously for the birth of our new baby as we decided to wait to find out the sex of our bundle of joy. Two weeks before our due date I began to have serious back pain (labor much to my denial) and off we went to have this baby!! Once we arrived it was discovered that our baby was breech, and as we prepared for an emergency cesarean, it was too late; and it continues to be true that our lovely daughter has ALWAYS had a mind of her own—even from the get go! Five hours into my labor, minus any pain medication a beautiful 5-

pound baby girl was born. Well, sort of. That very moment was so bitter sweet—we just learned our bundle of joy was a beautiful baby girl, but she was not breathing!! It took the NICU team 15 minutes to resuscitate our baby and the journey begins...

After spending a few months at the NICU we were finally able to take our beautiful daughter home and we were certain that we were ready for whatever came our way. It turns out that Taylor's primary medical need came from her condition known as Hypopituitarism. With a daily cocktail of replacement hormones we were able to sustain Taylor's health and this simply became a way of life. Shortly after we had her home we discovered that for no known reason both her hips were dislocated. This set back was a tremendous obstacle to endure and still we did not know anything about her visual impairment. Due to the nature of her hip reconstruction, we proceeded with treatment doing only one hip at a time, and she was in a complete body cast for the entire 1st of year of her life.

This is the time when we finally discovered that Taylor was blind. Well, actually my husband discovered it. One evening as he sat in his favorite chair and played with Taylor in his lap, he mentioned to me that he felt as if Taylor looked right through him. His comment of course was heart breaking to me, and I insisted that she would only need glasses. So the next day we went to visit the pediatrician and he made his referral to a pediatric ophthalmologist. Needless to say

that visit didn't last very long because the doctor looked at me and said, "She's blind—and there's nothing we can do about it." Of course I went to this visit alone because remember, I thought she only needed glasses. Without any comfort from the doctor at all, I went back home and waited for my husband to get home from work. I remember feeling like it took forever for him to get home. Once he arrived, I finally broke the news and we grieved together. Grieving because of the uncertainty of what the future held, not necessarily because of the fact that she was blind; we didn't even really understand what that really meant. Almost immediately we wiped the tears and just decided we would move forward, and like everything else up until this point, we just handled it the best we knew how.

We learned that Taylor was blind on a Friday, April 1, 1994. By the following Monday, I had ECI and a VI Teacher sitting on my living room floor. To be quite honest, I am not sure what prompted me to be in touch with ECI, but that's what I did, and because of their swift action I knew Taylor was going to fine.

From the beginning we have always worked at keeping a very strong relationship with the people involved in Taylor's educational programming. These people of course became a part of our family. I learned so much from each and every therapist and teacher that crossed our doorway. Because of the professional people in Taylor's life surrounding her educational programming, I became personally motivated and highly encouraged to join the world of being a VI teacher.

While Taylor was learning to read Braille I too was learning to read Braille, so that I could be a teacher too. Braille was a very big part of our lives. We found it to be so necessary to fill our world with Braille. Braille cards, place mats, jewelry, books, and even a Braille time out chair. Taylor has never known her world without the presence of a Perkins Braille! Braille obviously was the driving force to her existence, and pretend play was very important during this time. I am pretty certain that with such intense early exposure to Braille and constant communication, Taylor became a quick

talker, keeping us company with complete sentences by the age of 10 months

Incidentally, because Taylor spent so much of her life in a full body cast, it became very evident that she was missing out on the major component of independence—Orientation and Mobility!! Nonetheless, we worked hard at bringing her world to her.

Obviously we have had our share of struggles through the ebbs and flows of Taylor's educational programming, but ultimately, by remaining open-minded and working with a team of professionals towards one common goal, this journey has been pleasant. We are fortunate to have been working with the same VI/COMS, Janet Brewer, since PreK; and what makes this work is the common goal for Taylor's independence beyond high school.

All areas revolving around the Expanded Core Curriculum have been intricate parts in Taylor's independence. TSBVI has been there to help fulfill that role. When Mrs. Brewer approached me for the first time about sending Taylor to a short-term program at TSBVI, I knew she had fallen off her rocker!! I was NOT going to send my baby girl away! Needless to say...Taylor frequently attends the short programs and anxiously waits for the calendar to start planning early for the next year! In addition to attending the TSBVI short-term and summer programming, Taylor is also actively involved in her church community, as well as the small community we live in.

Although Taylor tends to be somewhat of a perfectionist, her strong desire to succeed makes me confident that she will fulfill her dreams of attending post-secondary education. Taylor is currently enrolled in a dual credit course for the fall, and plans to attend the Post-Secondary Program at TSBVI upon completion of her high school curriculum.

As a parent I've had to learn to pace myself in arriving at the decisions that need to be made for Taylor. On occasion Taylor has had to rein me in, and be that subtle reminder that she just wasn't

ready for certain things to take place in her life. At the same time she was there to let me know, “OK mom, it’s time. I’m ready for the next step.”

I continue to value the resources and information I gather from the TSBVI website along with the Family Connect website. I also stay extremely connected to the resources of my dear friends who are visually impaired adults. I have learned through this journey that the people you meet can often be the very thing you need to help move you to the next phase of your life.

As parents of children with visual impairments, we share a common bond. By sharing informa-

tion and supporting each other, we help our own families, but in doing so we help others as well. My daughter is unique and precious in her own way and riding this wave with her allows me to recognize any limitations, while at the same time celebrating her abilities. I encourage you all to remember to take the time for yourself and work on finding a balance in your life to be the best you can be for your child. Family is very important to who we are, and we try to discover ways to encourage Taylor’s natural drive towards independence by stepping back and promoting her efforts towards an independent life. We are now on to a new phase of our journey, but like any good book, “the rest is still unwritten”

## Teaching the Whole Concept: Learning about where our food comes from

By Amber Bobnar, Ivan’s mom, Kealahou, Hawaii

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*Abstract: A parent shares her strategies for helping her child learn through building real life experiences into their daily life.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, learning theory, concept development, expanded core curriculum.*

Learning whole concepts can be difficult and take some time for children with vision impairments. Rather than trying to teach everything at once, give your child time to explore his world, piece together information, and gather as much real experiences as possible over time.

Think about learning as the construction of a strong chain. Each link, by itself, is a minute learning experience. But as your child progresses and understands more, he will eventually be able to construct an entire chain of knowledge.

### CREATING A KNOWLEDGE CHAIN

Let’s look at food, for example. Your child’s first experience with food may be that it magically appears ready for consumption on the table in front of him. He learns about textures and flavors, dishes and silverware.



This is actually a very good beginning, and it’s important to give your child this time to explore the plate and table and learn about the social constructs involved in eating together.

## BUT HOW CAN YOU EXPAND ON THIS KNOWLEDGE?

### What's in the Kitchen?

You may next think about bringing your child into the kitchen and showing him how food is prepared and stored. Where do those bowls come from? Where do we keep the milk and the cereal? Why is one kept cold and the other not? How do we put them all together to create a bowl of cereal?

These are all important links in the chain of understanding food. The kitchen is a wonderful place to encourage exploration and learning. You may want to read this article on [Baking a Cake with Your Child](http://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/cake.html) for some ideas: <[www.wonderbaby.org/articles/cake.html](http://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/cake.html)>.

### Let's Buy Some Food!

Next, you could take your child to the grocery store or farmer's market to get a better idea of where your food comes from. The refrigerator doesn't just produce its own food! We need to go get it!

Shopping for food can be a real chore and it's often easier to leave the kids at home, but if you can manage it, try bringing them along with you. Ivan loves to touch all the produce at the grocery store, even things we don't buy. If I never buy a



full pineapple (and I don't—I usually buy canned pineapples) how will he learn that pineapples are spiky? Well, there are pineapples just waiting to be touched at the grocery store!

Walking through the grocery store deli or bakery, Ivan learns about smells and I talk to him about what's baking. In the center aisles Ivan touches cans and boxes and enjoys shaking them to hear the difference in sound—have you ever noticed that a box of pasta sounds very different than a box of rice?

At farmer's markets kids can learn a bit more about farms and where their food is grown. They can talk to the farmers and you can discuss that certain fruits and vegetables are in season while others aren't. There are also usually a lot of people walking their dogs at farmer's markets and Ivan loves to pet dogs!

### Time to Visit the Farm!

But I think the ultimate learning experience comes from visiting a real farm! Peaches are yummy to eat and your child may know now that you need to go to the store to get the peach before you can eat it, but where did that peach come from originally?

Talking about fruit and trees is a good start, but it's a really hard concept to understand without touching the trees and actually feeling how the fruit and leaves are attached. Taking your child out to a pick-your-own-fruit orchard is a wonder-



ful way to show them how trees grow and where fruit comes from.

Commercial fruit orchards usually trim their trees to grow low to the ground so even children in wheelchairs will be able to reach out and touch the lower branches, feel the leaves, and pick the fruit. Also, when fruits are in season farms will often organize celebrations that might involve music, cakes and pies, contests, hay rides, and more! And don't forget how much fun it is to eat a ripe peach or plum right off the tree!

### Bringing Your Food Home.

After visiting the farm and experiencing how food is grown, you'll now have a huge bag full of produce. Take those fruits and veggies home, get your kid back in the kitchen, and have fun preparing and eating the food you make!

You've just brought the entire concept full circle, from table to kitchen to store to farm and back to kitchen and table. And as long as your child was able to touch, feel, participate, and of course EAT, then you'll know they learned something very valuable and memorable.



Taking the time to fill in the gaps in your child's chain of knowledge is the best way to teach them whole concepts. Let them learn as they are engaged in an activity rather than trying to explain everything all at once. Experience is the best teacher!

And one more thing: If you like to enhance learning with music (like we do), then check out our favorite Songs About Food. Have fun! <[www.bostonchildrensmusic.com/favorite-food-songs](http://www.bostonchildrensmusic.com/favorite-food-songs)>

## Changing Perspectives: An adult's way of seeing their child differently

By Rebecca White, Parent, Baytown

*Abstract: A parent shares the lessons learned through considering the differences and similarities between her three children, and how her willingness to see things differently has led to embracing the gifts her child with special needs shares with everyone.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, multiple disabilities, strength-based perspective, parenting strategies*

The differences between a child without special needs and a child with them are obvious in some ways, I think. A regular kid goes through all the text book stages of development within target range: holding head up at 1 month, smiling at 2 months, trying baby cereal in the formula at 3 months, rolling over at 4 months, and so on. Parents can

compare their child's accomplishments based on a set standard chart designed by "them" to help us know if we should be concerned or not by our child's ability to reach developmental milestones. Parent can also expect to be reasonably excited with every check mark made, listing off all that their little bundles of joy are now doing.

For example, my little daughter who is also the middle child began walking completely on her own at the age of 7 months. This was the most amazing act of self-determination that I had ever seen. Witnessing a practical newborn walking around the coffee table, or just stand up in the middle of the floor and take steps is mind-boggling, to say the least. And, that is her most famous character trait to this day: self determination.

Then you have our oldest daughter. She began to army crawl at the age of four months old. Talk about “practical newborn!” I remember standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes, and every now and again I would walk over to the living room to peak my head in on the little one to make sure she was ok. The next thing I knew, I look around the corner and see this little baby pulling her body by her elbows into the kitchen. Four months old! I could not believe it! I got on the floor, elbows and all, cheering her all the way in, praising her for how strong and determined she is to come wash dishes with mommy. This characteristic has threaded like a chord throughout her life as well. And it has done her well in her ability to get through life as the first child of a mother who was 16 when she was born.

And finally, there’s the third child. This is the one that was born with special needs and the differences are astounding. According to the chart, children begin walking between the ages of 12 to 15 months. My son was holding his head up at 12 months. They say that they will be sitting up by the time they are nine months old, my son was almost two. And this was a huge feat! He has yet to crawl, and has had a feeding tube since he was two months old, so no holding the bottle on his own for him. Instead of looking at the newborn clothes he’s outgrown, his caregivers and I compare the fact that he’s outgrown his medical stroller, and is now advancing to a big boy wheel chair.

Teething wasn’t a big deal either. He actually didn’t get his first tooth until he was over a year old. Figuring out how to make him smile wasn’t accomplished until he was around nine months old. In between the seizures, his oldest sister

popped over his head and said “Boo!” which made him crack one. Rolling over was like moving Mount Rushmore. Literally. We would have to basically maneuver his whole body to have him laying mostly on his side/belly, then coax him to roll the rest of the 1/16th way. Instead of having mother’s groups and play dates, my release came in the form of online support groups and chance meetings by fellow families with like diagnosis’ in doctor’s office waiting rooms.

And yet, with all these differences and so many more, I can still find stronger similarities. There was a time when he was first born that all I could see was the differences. When he was first born it was all I could do to breathe. I felt like I was in quicksand and learning to keep my head up to avoid suffocating became a daily practice. Part of the difficulty in the journey was dealing with, looking at, and accepting the differences as they are. Changing my expectations and letting go of the ideas, the dreams, I had for my first born son. In doing so, I began to see things a little different.

With just a smidgen of willingness to see the similarities between he and his sisters, my whole world opened up. I was able to see the same self-determination and desire that my first two had when they were young children. I was able to see that his desire to live comes in the form of living past the seizures, living past the central apnea, living past the life-threatening surgeries.

The fact that he smiles at all tells me that he wants to be here and he loves to play. How similar is that? He loves to play. He loves to laugh and he loves it even more when people laugh with him. Just because his body doesn’t look the same, and just because he can’t see the same distance or determine in words what it is that he’s looking at, or crawl over to a toy and make it sing, doesn’t mean that he doesn’t want to be here, doesn’t have his own message to teach, or his own contributions to give.

It’s in the comparing and dividing that we find separation. It’s when I decide that he/we/they are not like others that I separate myself from the

whole and I feel divided. I mentally take away his purpose; I completely remove the possibility that he could have something to say when I decide to remove his ability to speak because it comes in the form of love. Not in words, the way I expect it to.

It's in my ability to unite, include, and join together that I perpetuate peace. Being granted the confusing, sometimes daunting, yet unmistakably divine blessing of being his mother means I can choose to be a channel for this. I can learn from his willingness to be playful at all times, in sickness and in health; from his determination to look past his

pain and limitations, for the funny moments in life; or from his desire to bring joy to everything and everyone he meets, including himself, by laughing at even the most insignificant moments.

He does what all kids do; he is just in raw, unchanged form. He has no desire to know the world any different than the loving, carefree, joyous occasion that it is. For kids, being childlike is the greatest ability of all. We tell our kids to stay young as long as they can for a reason. Maybe this is why. Maybe kids are really supposed to be our teachers and not the other way around.

## **Adaptations for Life: A TVI's life experience brings personal wisdom to the job**

By John Rose, Teacher, Special Programs, TSBVI

*Abstract: The author interviews a professional with a visual impairment about her life experiences, including the strategies she uses to be independent.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, low vision, personal experience*

*Author's Note: The following report was written for Foundations of Visual Impairment training that is required of all new teacher assistants (TAs) at TSBVI. The assignment was to interview someone with a visual impairment about adaptations that he or she makes to accommodate daily life. In the course of interviewing Cindy Bachofer, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) in Special Programs, I realized that her life experience with personal adaptations motivates her to help students with visual impairments.*

Cindy Bachofer is a teacher in Special Programs at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She is also a person with a visual impairment (VI). Her personal history is intertwined with the adaptations she has made to accommodate her visual impairment at work, at home, and in between.

Born in Kansas three months premature, Cindy was diagnosed with retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), a condition that causes abnormal blood vessels to grow in the retina shortly after a premature baby is born. "Over time this vessel growth produces a fibrous scar tissue which attaches to the retina and the vitreous gel that gives the eyeball its shape. This ring may extend 360 degrees around the inside of the eye. If enough scar tis-

sue forms, it can begin to pull the retina, detaching it, and, in some cases, causing blindness." (Moss, 1998.)

Her family instilled in her an attitude of self-sufficiency and hard work. For Cindy, this translated into reading books, because the world of reading was accessible to her. As her condition progressed and her vision degraded, Cindy was exposed to oversized books. Because she had been successful, these adaptations seemed silly to her. Growing up in her community, Cindy was not aware of what her condition really meant and knew of no other people with low vision.

Her parents' "boot straps" mentality forced Cindy into an independent attitude, but she was depen-

dent upon doctors who told her what tools to use. She describes how embarrassed she was after her eye doctor gave her a bioptic for continuous wear. She walked around her college campus and people just stared. On one hand, she felt like she could do anything and was willing to work hard to achieve her goals. On the other hand, she struggled with knowing her limitations, negotiating dependence, accessing large-print and devices, and advocating for her needs. Cindy describes a slow learning curve when it came to these and other psycho-social adaptations.

She was taught that independence meant being able to do what everyone else could do. Self-advocacy was equated with whining rather than speaking up for one's wants, needs, and entitlements for the purpose of achieving goals. (Krebs, 2002) Having difficulties making psycho-social adaptations, Cindy found herself making frequent job changes and experiencing frustrations with transportation.

Even when she was working on her doctorate at Vanderbilt, Cindy had a difficult time asking for accommodations from professors, not to mention receiving the accommodations that she deserved. Under the guiding influence of Ann Corn at Vanderbilt, Cindy learned and became more comfortable with what tools she needed for daily life; what accommodations she required and how to ask for them; and navigating the social scene. The complexities of communication and social contact that sighted individuals often take for granted, Cindy describes as very difficult for someone with low vision.

Currently, Cindy has a specific repertoire of adaptations that she uses to navigate daily life at work, home, and in transition. She uses a telescope for reading street signs and overhead Information in stores as needed. Because she has good near vision, she requires minimal modifications. She uses Control and the + (plus) key to zoom in on the Internet. She uses view and zoom in text documents. Cindy requires good, preferably natural, lighting at work and adds that advocacy is important to get the lighting she needs. She uses colored folders, large print labels and abbrevia-

tions, but she laughingly notes that this may have more to do with her poor organizational skills. In addition, Cindy uses a magnifier on a daily basis, especially in meetings.

With transportation, Cindy describes learning through the school of hard knocks. Frustrations include learning the bus schedules, a lack of reliability on departure times, no privacy, and potentially unpleasant drivers. Since her telescope often does not give good information from inside the bus, she relies on her memory or the driver to help her get to the right stop. When she leaves the house, she simply "hopes it is a good day." On a good note, Cindy mentions that bus trips are free for blind/VI people with a disability card. Also, some drivers have come to know her and are helpful. As for alternatives to riding the bus, Cindy has experienced scheduling issues with Metro special transit vans, because they must be requested in advance and you must leave whenever they arrive to pick you up. In her experience, taxi service is often unreliable, but after a long process she has found a reliable driver. Cindy rarely asks others for rides, because of the added strain it can place on relationships.

Cindy describes home as the easiest place for her. Her memory is good. The worst thing with apartment living for her is the lighting, which she describes as "terrible." She keeps magnifiers on tables and a telescope by the chair in the living room for watching TV. She uses a magnifier for cooking, but only for reading boxes. One of her biggest struggles has been her cellular telephone. (She finally read her cell phone manual and figured out accessibility.)

When asked for final words, Cindy added that the most difficult adaptation that she struggles with is adapting to non-verbal communication. Picking up on mouthed words in meetings, winks, nods, and other facial expressions is difficult, if not impossible, to learn. Although it has been frustrating for her, she is glad to understand the connection between eye contact, non-verbal communication, and social relationships. Finally, she finds it hard to believe that students in 2010 are dealing with the same issues that she was

dealing with in 1970. It is easy to see how Cindy Bachofer's visual impairment is so closely connected to her work, and why she strives to help visually impaired students and their families by sharing information, experiences, and resources to better their lives.

Moss, Kate. 1998. Retinopathy of Prematurity. *SEE/HEAR*, Winter 1998. <[www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/winter98/rop.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/winter98/rop.htm)> (Accessed January 29, 2010).

Krebs, Cathryn S. 2002. Self-Advocacy Skills: A Portfolio Approach. *SEE/HEAR*, Fall 2002. <[www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/fall02/self-advocacy.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/fall02/self-advocacy.htm)> (Accessed 1-29-10).

## Pass the Popcorn!

By Michele Chauvin, Parent and Family Leader, Sugar Land, TX

*Abstract: A parent describes how she, her daughter, and another family went to the movies just like their friends. Their children have significant visual impairments that prevent them from accessing movies with their eyes only. The descriptive video service allows them to follow the plot of the movie by describing the actions not understood without visual input. She offers tips and information to make this a positive experience for everyone.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, expanded core curriculum, recreation, leisure, descriptive video services, movies, blind, visual impairment*

*Editor's note: Two components of the Expanded Core Curriculum are Recreation & Leisure skills and Social skills. Going to the movies with friends is a common experience that develops all of these skills for children and teens. A parent on the TX VI Family e-mail list shared an experience her daughter had watching a movie at a public theater with friends. If you are a parent of a child with a visual impairment including additional disabilities such as deafblindness, you may subscribe to the TX VI Family e-mail list at <[www.topica.com/lists/txvifamily](http://www.topica.com/lists/txvifamily)>.*

Amy, Madison, Lauren and I went to see the movie "Despicable Me" with audio descriptions at the AMC Studio 30 on Dunvale in Houston this weekend. It all worked out well. The theater knew what equipment they had, knew how it worked, and it did work. Hooray! The girls enjoyed the movie and definitely the movie snacks. Amy and I were so excited.

In the past, several families have said they had trouble watching movies at theaters with audio descriptions. Last July during the NAPVI Families Connecting with Families Conference 2009, hundreds of families attending the conference, along with Disney Pixar executives in Orange County, CA, attended a theater showing of the movie "Up" with audio descriptions. Also, staff from WGBH in Boston, who does all the Descriptive Video Service (DVS) nationwide, spoke dur-

ing one of the conference sessions. Here are a few things I learned from both experiences.

1. Check the Mopix website to see what movies are currently available with audio descriptions. <http://ncam.wgbh.org/mopix/>
2. Check specific theater chains and locations to find which movies in your area are available with descriptions. The only two chains for which I have found accessibility info are AMC and Regal (Edwards). Edwards lists accessibility info on the showtime listings page for each specific theater, usually under the available times. AMC has a link <[www.amcentertainment.com/AssistedMoviegoing](http://www.amcentertainment.com/AssistedMoviegoing)> and there may be others.
3. There are different headsets. One is for deaf and/or hard of hearing. One is for audio

descriptions. Most theaters are only familiar with the first type.

4. You have to sit towards the middle of the theater for best quality sound. The first 4-5 seats on both ends of each row may only transmit static.
5. If a theater does not know how it all works, contact the accessibility staff on a national level for that theater chain. They may have to educate specific theaters on what equipment they have and how it works.

Just because a movie is available with audio descriptions and a theater has the equipment does not mean the movie is available with audio descriptions at that specific theater. Generally, there may be only 1-2 theaters in a large city playing a particular movie with audio descriptions, even

if that movie is playing at every theater in town. Does that make sense? For example, today “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” is playing at AMC with audio descriptions in Dallas but not in Houston. Hope this helps. Keep trying...and happy movie going!

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blind Mice Mart has free movie downloads at <[http://www.blindmicemart.com/assets/product\\_images/movies2.html](http://www.blindmicemart.com/assets/product_images/movies2.html)>.

Find descriptive video and listen to examples at <<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/access>>.

Learn how to advocate for more descriptive movies at <<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/dvsondvd.html>>.

## TAPVI TALKS

By Isela Wilson, President, Texas Association for Parents of children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI)

*Abstract: The statewide organization for parents of children with visual impairments announces their new board and seeks to provide regional support.*

*Keywords: family wisdom, parent organization, visually impaired, parent training*

From the President: a warm welcome to everyone!

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Isela Wilson, I am the current President of TAPVI, Texas Association for Parents of children with Visual Impairments. My grandson Andrew has CVI, cortical visual Impairment and additional



global delays due to Cerebral Palsy. Several years ago I became aware of TAPVI’s existence while attending a Texas Focus Conference. I decided to join the group because my husband and I had just become painfully aware of how much our grandson’s visual impairment

affects his learning. Other TAPVI parents we met related to what we were going through. In June of 2008 I volunteered and was voted President Elect of TAPVI. In June of this year at the bi-annual Texas Focus I took my position as your new President.

TAPVI helps connect families statewide, identify resources, provide referrals, educate parents and professionals, and advocate for improved services for all blind and visually impaired children. Parent members volunteer their time and talents to ensure a brighter future for all Texas VI families. We are affiliates with the national organization NAPVI which provides scholarships, training through conferences and workshops, a national publication called Awareness, a national website, FamilyConnect.com, and much more.

TAPVI's existence, accomplishments and success are due to the wonderful relationships that have been built over the years with various organizations, both private and state agencies for the blind. Most notably, TSBVI Outreach has provided much appreciated guidance and support through our TAPVI advisors.

As of today there are still thousands of parents and professionals unaware of TAPVI as a resource for Texas families. In our state, there are over 8,700 children 0-22 who have been recognized as VI and receive state and educational services. We at TAPVI look forward to the day when all Texas VI families are connected with the resources and support they need.

This year we sent out a survey to all TAPVI members to ask what TAPVI could do to improve our services to VI families. The overwhelming responses were; Recreation and Leisure activities and local support group meetings. To accomplish this in our vast State we will need some help. If any one would like to volunteer to be a member at large in your area please contact anyone of our board members for more information. If you are not a member yet and would like to join TAPVI below is our contact information.

Do not hesitate to contact us if there is anything we can help you with. Your TAPVI board is here to serve all its members.

**President**

Isela Wilson  
(956) 778-1142  
iselawilson@yahoo.com

**President Elect**

Amy Hayes  
(281) 923-7760  
amyhayes@earthlink.net

**Past President**

Michele Chauvin  
(832) 248-6703  
michelechauvin@yahoo.com

**Secretary**

Irasema Ramirez  
(956) 763-5034  
iraramz@yahoo.com

**Treasurer/Database**

Alma Granada  
(956)735-9247  
alma.granado@yahoo.com

### Texas Makes National POBC News

At this year's Annual Meeting in Dallas, the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children elected a new president and board. The new president is Laura Weber of Texas. Laura is the very capable founder and past president of the Texas POBC, a very lively and dynamic chapter. She is the mom of Lindsay Adair who just turned eight years old and will be entering second grade in the fall at her local elementary school. Laura, her husband John, and Lindsay live near Houston.

Laura had a seventeen-year career as a biomedical engineer at NASA's Johnson Space Center. Recently, she shifted gears and is now in the last class of a master's program in special education. Student teaching comes next in the fall. Once she is certified in special education, Laura plans to pursue certification as a teacher of blind students. Laura has also successfully completed all the required coursework for certification as a literary braille transcriber and is working on completing her manuscript. It will be a wonderful thing to have a person like Laura as a professional in the blindness field.

Texas will be represented well with two board members, Lety Castillo and Sally Thomas, both from the Houston area. For more information on this parent organization go to <[www.tpobc.org](http://www.tpobc.org)>.

# Where in the World am I? How to be your child's first Orientation and Mobility Instructor

Kathie Preece, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, East Williamson County Co-op, Taylor Texas

*Abstract: The author provides ideas for movement and multi-sensory experiences for children with visual impairments.*

*Keywords: Effective Practices, orientation and mobility, young children, visually impaired.*

A child is born to two adoring parents as a precious miracle. Watching this baby grow and develop is as much a miracle as the actual birth. When a child has sensory impairments, his development may be unique to him and to the family experiences. It's OK if he is not doing the same exact things as other babies his age. He will do most of the same things, just in his own way and in his own time. However, many things that a sighted child learns just by watching and looking will have to be actively taught to a child with a visual impairment. As much as 90% of all learning is done incidentally, just by observing things visually. Much of what a typical child learns incidentally will have to be actively taught to a child with a visual impairment.

Here are two play activities that will promote the development of several senses and how they work together.

## **TASTY FINGERS**

Mix a box of your favorite flavor of pudding (instant or regular) or gelatin with just enough water to make it the consistency of finger paint. Then spread out a large piece of paper on the floor or table (or even outside).

Use the pudding as paint and finger paint all over the paper. You can even stick your feet in it and walk on the paper to make footprints. Once the paper is dry, you can cut out cute shapes to decorate the house or make cards to send to Grandma.

It's fun to do this activity in the bathtub or shower. Just do the painting on the walls and in the tub and then wash it away! It's especially fun to do body painting when doing this activity in the tub. It's OK to lick fingers during this activity; it's encouraged!

Now, if you're really brave and adventurous, you can also use peanut butter, jelly, whipped cream or any other smooth or slightly rough textured food.)

## **ALLIGATOR PIT**

Find an old board that is smooth and splinter-free.

Cut out oblong shapes from textured material (sandpaper, vinyl, plastic shower curtain, fun foam, etc.) to make the "alligators".

Lay the board on the floor and put the alligators all around the board. Let your child feel them and help lay them out around the board. The object of the game is to walk across the board without falling into the alligator pit and touching an alligator. Walking across the board barefoot will provide more sensory feedback. If you fall into the pit and touch an alligator, you get tickled by everyone else who is playing!

Be brave now, parents and teachers—you go first and show your child how much fun this game is. Let her see or feel how you move your body through space to accomplish this task.

# What Does My Child See and How Do I Know? Now What Do I Do? Activities and Toys to Encourage Visual Use

By Jill Brown, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), Crowley ISD, Crowley, TX

*Abstract: this article describes many activities and materials for play and learning with young children with visual impairments. High contrast and manipulative qualities are described.*

*Keywords: Effective Practices, visually impaired, play, motor skills, exploration.*

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Just what does “my” child see? Trying to explain what a child can see, how she sees, and why she can’t see mom’s face but can find a ball on the carpet are challenging issues. The family may say the child “sees” all his toys, but the teacher cannot get him to look at his educational task. This brings me to the question, “What is vision?”

Vision is one of the distance senses which helps bring together information we receive from the environment. It links together the information that we receive from our other senses. Vision gives us a great deal of information holistically. At a glance, vision gives us information of distance, depth, color, texture, size, shape, movement. Our sense of touch can only give us partial meaning, due to the limited surface our hands can touch. Our sense of taste and smell are limited in the information they can give us, in that they are dependent upon our direct contact with that information. We use our hearing to gather meaning, but we can only process one piece of information at a time. We rely heavily upon our vision to give concrete understanding to reaffirm what we heard. Vision is more than just the eyes.

So how does vision work? Let’s begin with the eyes. Our eyes recognize light and dark. The light travels through the front of the eye through the cornea pupil and lens. The job of the cornea and lens is to help gather the light into a bundle to send it to the back of the eye. The back of the eye is called the retina. The retina’s job is to take the light information and transfer it into electrical

signal so that it can travel through the optic nerve to take the information to the brain.

The actual understanding of “seeing” does not happen until the brain receives this information. The eye can be thought of as a “camera” that takes pictures. It is not until that picture is processed (our brain) that we understand what the camera took a snap shot of. Vision is more than just taking a snapshot of an event. It is being able to understand almost instantaneously what we see. That can only happen in the brain. Research now tells us that the “seeing” part of the brain takes place in many different places within the brain, not just one area.

Our responses to what we see are usually immediate. When we see an item we want, we reach out to grasp it. We have developed an understanding based on experience of distance and depth to gage how we reach and if we need to change our position to reach. Our past visual motor experiences help us understand size, shape, and texture and how to grasp the desired item.

As an adult, this action takes place subconsciously. But this motion is actually a learned movement that began at birth. This is seen when a baby reaches out to a bottle or toy. This motion begins at first with uncoordinated movements in the young infant. As experience with visual motor skills continues, the child becomes increasingly proficient in using eye-hand and eye-foot movement. The infant eventually learns to bat at a toy

leading to reach and grasp. This gives the child an immediate feedback to their visual system.

Children also use their vision to learn what is happening at a distance. If they see a mommy or daddy coming with a gift, they get excited and run towards the parent. The facial expressions let the parent know the child is happy. Young children will stick out their tongue and make faces upon imitation from another person. If a stranger is present, the young child may be fearful based on visual observation and understanding that the face of the stranger is unfamiliar.

Vision also gives us understanding that other people see us and reciprocate our actions. For example, when we see someone, we smile and wave. When they see us greeting them, they respond by smiling and waving back. An infant may smile when a person smiles at them. An infant will turn her head to follow a slow moving item or pick his head up when he is on his tummy, to visually observe the environment. This head movement is the beginning of rolling, sitting and crawling in young infants, because they see something and want to get closer to it.

What happens to visual responses when vision is impaired? Many times children with low vision or cerebral visual impairment (CVI) will respond differently to visual information. Individuals with CVI may appear non-responsive to items placed in front of them or they appear to “look through” presentation of toys. Sometimes individuals with CVI cannot process the all the information available to them. By simplifying the visual target we may help the child to visually find their toy.

Children with visual impairment may exhibit a variety of responses to visual input. Children with severe motor impairments, may blink excessively or close their eyes. They may be able to see the toy, but have difficulty moving their bodies to obtain the toy. More subtle responses include changes in their breathing or skin color. Children with low vision, may overreach or under-reach for items. They may turn their head as they reach or close their eyes. They may be able to see some-

thing but don't have enough visual information to interpret the toy so they sit quietly.

While we cannot improve vision, we can enhance items so students will be able to focus on them. Select a contrasting solid colored background to help the toy stand out. Highlight the toy with a flashlight. Outline the edges of the toy with a bright colored duct tape (or black for contrast). Use a rubber mat (such as a shelf liner) to keep toys from slipping too much.

When choosing items, try manipulating them yourself. Try getting down on the floor and see as the child sees. Choose toys that can be played with in a variety of ways. Use toys that encourage manipulation, construction or performing an action. In this way the child is actively engaged in play instead of watching the toy. Select toys that will involve other members of the family or classroom. This will encourage social interactions. Select toys that are practical, safe, easy to handle, easy to clean, and durable. Varying types of toys will encourage your child to incorporate different play schemata. Also consider rotating toys the child plays with every few months, putting some away to increase novelty and interest. Families and teachers can brainstorm together to select toys for the child.

## ACTIVITIES AND TOYS TO ENCOURAGE VISUAL ENGAGEMENT

### For infants

- Items that have bright colors such as Big Bird, Elmo, or any of the “Sesame Street” characters. This can be incorporated in mobiles, play pen toys, and rattles
- Items that have a simple pattern, stripes and bull's eyes are good ones to start with. Use of black and white may help the child to focus on items. Covering the baby bottle with striped cloth can help low vision children find the bottle. Covering bottles with textured material will give the non-visual child something of interest to touch. Use

socks that have red/white or black/white stripes. Sew a bell at the end to give this an added sound for interest.

- Consider the blanket or play mats that the child lays on. You can use a sheet or other solid colored fabric to provide contrast for a toy.
- Use colorful plastic patio lights or Christmas lights along a wall or railing. Caution should be noted to be sure all electrical cords are inaccessible. Be cautious about flashing lights if the child has seizure disorder.
- Place items where the child has to reach to attain the toy. This will encourage not only reach and grasp but movement to get a toy.
- Mirrors, pinwheels and other reflective materials such as spoons or keys. This can include use of pie tins, unbreakable shiny Christmas ornaments, pom-poms and mylar wrapping paper or balloons and bicycle reflectors. The reflective properties entertain children but should not go into the mouth.
- Sturdy Picture books such as board books and plastic or cloth books are interesting to young children.
- Age appropriate rattle toys. These can be store bought or homemade. Fill a clear plastic soda bottle with a variety of items such as beads, pom-poms, bells, glitter, beans, or other small items. Glue the lid on securely.
- Simple squeak toys like a yellow rubber ducky. Try to keep the item a single color. Many colors or patterns may be visually confusing for the child to look at.
- Puppets: either commercially bought or homemade. This can include sock puppets (socks come in many interesting colors and textures) or other material.
- Wrist and foot rattles to encourage looking at hands and feet. I have used hair “scrunchies” filled with bells or crinkle paper as wrist or foot rattles.

## For Toddlers

- Use plastic storage containers to put items in and out of and see what is inside.
- Blocks of any type (made of wood, plastic, or recycled milk cartons or boxes)
- Toys that move such as: cars, trucks, push toys, and balls
- Noise making toys such as old pots and pans, musical instruments such as xylophones, drums and bells. Homemade noise making toys such as a plastic or metal coffee can with beans, rice, and bells with the lid taped or glued shut.
- Singalong tapes or CDs or videos (use of colored duct tape will help child to know which tape is which)
- Eating: encourage use of finger feeding. Use contrasting placemats to help the child visually find their food (a dark placemat with cheerios or white placemat for raisins)
- Lightbox activities (50 Ways to Use a Lightbox: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/lightbox.htm> and Intervention Strategies: <http://www.aph.org/cvi/inter.html>)
- Rolling or crawling to a familiar voice
- Create varying floor surfaces for practicing crawling and walking. Use mats, carpets, smooth floor surfaces, carpet squares on tile floors.
- Design safe spaces for crawling in or climbing over, using sofa cushions, cardboard boxes, and sheets.

## For Pre-Schoolers

- Shape sorter: try using contrasting tape around the edges to enhance visual contrast
- Simple pictures of family members; cartoon characters. Keep the background of the picture plain, preferably dark, this will enhance the picture in the foreground.

- Keeping a toy box and encourage the child to find a toy and then replace the toy when finished
- Balls or bean bags: a punch ball balloon with a few grains of rice for added sound cues to help facilitate throwing and catching. If the child is afraid to catch a moving ball, use the punch ball and hold it until the child can see it and reach out. The child can also catch it as you drop the balloon.
- Stringing beads: use a shoelace and various pasta shapes, or large bead. You can color the pasta shells by letting them soak in rubbing alcohol and food coloring for a few minutes (recipes on-line).
- Wind-up toys are fun to watch and restart
- Velcro balls and target: can be bought commercially or put Velcro strips on a tennis ball or whiffle ball and throw to a target. You can make a target out of car-headliner material glued to poster board. The kids enjoy this.
- Finger painting either with paints or homemade materials: use a contrasting mat to encourage use of vision as the child plays. Homemade materials can include jello, pudding, icing or shaving cream.

This is only a sampling of the many toys you come in contact with. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but a springboard for many other ideas. You may have to initially show the child how to play with the items. Once they understand the toy, they will want to play with it. Then we can help them to use their vision to locate and find the toy. Most of all have fun. Know the child's cues of wanting more versus being overwhelmed by all the stimulation or getting bored of the toy.

## WEBSITE RESOURCES

- o Our Favorite Toys:  
[www.obs.org/page.php?ITEM=23](http://www.obs.org/page.php?ITEM=23)
- o Some General Ideas to Help Children with Special Needs:  
[www.nncc.org/Diversity/divers.disable.special.html](http://www.nncc.org/Diversity/divers.disable.special.html)
- o How to do the Infant Visual Stimulation in Fun and Creative Ways:  
[www.best-child-toys.com/infant-visual-stimulation.html](http://www.best-child-toys.com/infant-visual-stimulation.html)
- o Guide to Toys 2008:  
[www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=82](http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=82)
- o Sensory Stimulation for Children with Albinism:  
<http://74.125.93.132/search?q=cache:XPW4pdC50owJ:www.vipsight.org/Visual%2520Stimulation.doc+toys+to+encourage+visual+use&cd=31&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>
- o Homemade Toys, Games, and Activities for Children 1 to 3 Years Old:  
[www.otexchange.com/docs/Homemade%20Toys,%20Games,%20Activities%20for%20EI%20-%20Deanna%20Iris%20Sava%20and%20Barbara%20Weber.pdf](http://www.otexchange.com/docs/Homemade%20Toys,%20Games,%20Activities%20for%20EI%20-%20Deanna%20Iris%20Sava%20and%20Barbara%20Weber.pdf)
- o Play and the Child with Visual Impairment:  
[www.lekotek.org/pdfs/packets/VISION\\_PACKET.pdf](http://www.lekotek.org/pdfs/packets/VISION_PACKET.pdf)
- o Finding Appropriate Toys:  
[www.lighthouse.org/about-low-vision-blindness/childrens-vision/guide-for-parents/toys](http://www.lighthouse.org/about-low-vision-blindness/childrens-vision/guide-for-parents/toys)
- o Toy Info.org. (This website has 3 Play Guides available for downloading. Also available in Spanish):  
[www.toyassociation.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=TINFO\\_Home](http://www.toyassociation.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=TINFO_Home)
- o Creating Educational Toys and Activities for Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired:  
[www.tsbvi.edu/Education/activities.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/activities.htm)

# Imaginative Play

by Catherine A. Smyth, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (CTVI), Anchor Center for Blind Children, Denver, Colorado

*Abstract: The author describes stages imaginative play in the developing child, and how parents and caregivers can support and provide compensatory experiences for children who are blind or visually impaired.*

*Keywords: blind children, play, early childhood*

“When will my child be interested in the dollhouse her Grandfather made for her?”

“My other daughter loved to dress up like a princess at this age.”

“My son talks to his father on the phone, but if I give him the toy phone, he won’t talk!”

Imaginative play or symbolic play includes many levels of understanding. Children must have a clear understanding of what an object represents in real life before they can learn how to represent an object in play. Imaginative play is acquired in sighted children through imitation: they watch their parents and siblings do chores around the house and to be like them, they imitate sweeping, washing dishes, mowing the lawn, and other activities. Children identify characters in books and real life community members through the clothing they wear and the roles they play. Vision allows children to make connections between the firefighter, the red truck and the fire station down the street. The differences between animals on the farm are obvious from a visual standpoint. The back of the school bus is very different in shape and purpose.

A child with a visual impairment requires real-life experiences and many opportunities to practice pretend play before he or she can master these complex tasks. Introducing the skills of imaginative play is an exciting and rewarding process for families and early interventionists.

## TYPES OF IMAGINATIVE PLAY

### Using Everyday Objects

The simplest type of imaginative play is pretending with everyday objects. Children talk on the phone, drink out of an empty cup, and push the buttons on the remote. In order to understand that they can pretend to engage in these activities, young children with visual impairments must have experiences with how the real objects work. This requires many repetitions of first tactile exploration of the object, direct instruction on how to interact with the object, and finally hearing the language that is involved with using the object. For example, talking on the phone involves the motor and tactile skills of pushing the buttons to make a call or to answer, holding the phone to the ear to hear the person on the other end, and a very specific vocabulary. The motivation to use these everyday objects is the feedback the child receives such as hearing Grandma’s voice, having a drink or finding their favorite musical show on the television. In pretend play, children do not receive this feedback. They must move past the simple cause/effect response in understanding the benefits of imitating others through social interaction.

### Routines of the Day

The next level of imaginative play involves imitating routines experienced around the home by the child every day. Usually children will start

to pretend activities that they like to participate in such as taking a bath, helping a parent take laundry out of the dryer, or even feeding a doll a bottle. Parents can encourage this kind of pretending by providing real-life “props” such as a small basket with a washcloth, a spray bottle and maybe a favorite toy that is used only in the bath. Children that love bath time can be seen washing themselves with the washcloth, singing bath time songs and lining up small toys like rubber ducks that have been sprayed with water. Only when children with visual impairments understand all the concepts and actions in a routine will they be ready to act out the routine as pretend play.

Using a doll or a stuffed animal in a pretend play routine is a higher level of understanding. The child must understand that the doll represents a baby, or even themselves. Children with sight learn this connection quickly through incidental learning, but children with visual impairments must participate in routines with the doll and hear their parents or caregivers interact with the doll as well as themselves. Again, this representative play involves processing the activity and the language over many repetitions.

As children become more familiar with using everyday objects to represent routines, this play can become increasingly complex. Parents can encourage such play by providing a drawer or a cabinet in the kitchen where their child can explore safe kitchen items and participate in meal-time preparation. Stirring, fitting lids to pots and pans and nesting measuring cups are all motivating learning tasks that help relationship concepts develop as well as allowing children to experience family routines. This symbolic play can be expanded later to include setting a child-sized table for dolls or family members and serving tea and cookies. Of course, cleaning up should be part of the play process!

### **Dress Up Play**

Pretending to be someone else in play requires understanding the characteristics and roles of

others. It is easier for a child to pretend to be someone they are exposed to everyday like their parents, rather than a firefighter or a ballerina, that they may never have met or experienced.

Providing an area in the house where a child with visual impairment can imitate the tasks of others, like a small table in the kitchen or a desk with a small writing center, will encourage the child to be “just like mommy or daddy” in their everyday routines. Another motivating activity is to encourage your child to pretend to be like a family pet, allowing them to drink from a small dish on the floor or going for a “walk” in the backyard. Talking about wearing a hat like a favorite character in a book will allow your child to understand that these differences are exciting and that it is fun to pretend to be someone else sometimes! Different clothing identifies community members to others, and the child with the visual impairment will need to be introduced to these differences through touch and experience. Practicing these skills at home will give your child confidence in the dress up corner at preschool where very important social skills develop between children.

### **Schema play**

The next step in using representational objects through play is to understand that small figures and objects can imitate the activities of real people. This “schema” play includes little people in a school bus, construction workers and trucks in the sandbox or a dollhouse. This is a complex activity for children with a visual impairment, as they must understand the experience in real life. Many field trips to the farm that include touching, hearing and smelling the animals and equipment will give meaning to pretending that the chicken figure has laid an egg or the farmer is feeding the cows.

A ride on a school bus and exploring all the parts like the seats or the door will assist children with understanding why the driver says “Move on back” and the small people move toward the back of the toy bus. If a child has sight, the “back of

the bus” is an easy concept to attain through vision. A child with vision impairment needs to walk to the back of the bus, feel what is different about the back of the bus, use language to process the differences and then generalize that knowledge to the small toy bus. This may take many experiences and direct interventions before the child can independently play with a toy bus using pretend play.

Participating in imaginative play activities is a complex task for the young child with a visual impairment. It is necessary for the child to understand the purpose of the real object or the role of the actual person before they can begin to engage in representative play. The best way to achieve strong concept development and language use in imaginative play is through repeated real-life experiences and practice in a safe environment.

## A Week of Social Skills

By Cyral Miller, Outreach Director, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Pat Boyd, Program Manager, Houston Independent School District

*Abstract: the authors challenge readers to sponsor an event or time for developing and practicing appropriate social skills. Readers are encouraged to send in ideas.*

*Keywords: Effective Practices, blind, social skills*

### **SURE TRACK TO STUDENT SUCCESS: SPONSOR A WEEK (OR DAY) FOR SOCIAL SKILLS!**

Ever wonder how to highlight the importance of social skills for students with visual impairment on your caseload or in your town? Join with educators and families across Texas in sponsoring a special Week (or Day) of Social Skills this year. Create a week of activities and lessons and let us know how it goes. This can be as simple as a daily 5 minute practice with ways to say “Hello, how are you?” or as complicated as planning and hosting a party for all the students in a particular group. We will collect ideas from around the state and report back so that next year, more of us can jump-start social skills learning in our communities. It might be easiest to attach this theme to an existing event, such as a holiday party (Halloween greetings, anyone?), or a historical date (How did the Pilgrims invite the Native Americans to their party? How many ways can you invite someone to an event?).

Social skills don’t magically develop even in typically developing students. These skills develop over time, and must be specifically taught and supported throughout each and every day. Students with visual impairments, without visual models of people around them, often find that learning social graces can be a challenge. For most students, annual assessment of social development and individualized education plan (IEP) goals in this area will be important throughout their school years.

### **NOT SURE WHERE TO START?**

Dr. Sharon Sacks, Director of Curriculum at the California School for the Blind, created the following list of skills that help blind persons integrate effectively in social situations:

- Direction of gaze
- Relaxed but erect body stance
- Positive initiations

Expansion of conversation topics  
 Sharing in group of activities  
 Turn-taking in conversations or interactions  
 Repertoire of play activities that promote inclusion into activities  
 Appropriate dress and grooming  
 Eating etiquette  
 Facial expressions  
 Interpreting verbal and non-verbal cues  
 Expectations for situational behaviors for play, school, and work experiences  
 Decision-making skills  
 Problem-solving skills  
 Complimenting and empathy skills  
 Ability to draw upon past experiences

Can you pick one or more of these skills and develop a week of lessons that can help your

student(s) or your child? There are curricula and assessment protocols from the VI field. Go to <[www.tsbvi.edu/REC2Web](http://www.tsbvi.edu/REC2Web)> and search under social interaction.

There are also MANY general resources for activities, lesson plans, and evaluation tools on the web. Put social skills into a search engine and then use your VI knowledge on how to adapt activities using non-visual strategies. Perhaps there are initiatives already happening in the schools that you can expand for your students?

Social skills are fun to teach! Be creative and see what kind of buzz you can create for your students! Becoming a socially competent adult is one of the most significant predictors of school outcome successes.

Send a brief description of your social skills instructional activities and experiences by e-mail to <[cyralmiller@tsbvi.edu](mailto:cyralmiller@tsbvi.edu)>. You may see your ideas in upcoming issues of *TX SenseAbilities*!

## Our First Mission Survival!

Dawn Adams, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (CTVI), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), M.Ed. consultant for the visually impaired, Region 8 ESC Mount Pleasant, TX.

*Abstract: the author, a specialist in visual impairment at a regional education service center, describes a special event in which students with blindness and visual impairment participate in competitive activities using a variety of vocational and job related skills.*

*Keywords: blind, visually impaired, vocational skills*

At Region 8 during the 2009-2010 school year we decided to do something different than our past compensatory skills events. We called it Mission: Survival! The event was designed so that both students with visual impairments and those with additional disabilities could participate.

We used our four-room conference center and designated each room as an activity center for

various vocational skills. One of the rooms was set up like a hotel room, one as a restaurant, one as an office, and one as a game room where the students could practice writing ability statements, and play games. One of the games they could play was Jobardy! This is a game that focuses on interview and employment knowledge and skills and was developed by the Division for Blind Services.

In the restaurant, the students made banana pudding parfaits, decorated the tables with silk flowers, tablecloths, and the silverware they had rolled. In the hotel students learned how to make a bed, pack a suitcase, fold towels, hang clothes, and other tasks. The office was abuzz as the students retrieved voice messages, wrote them down using their preferred writing media, typed passages on the computer, folded paper, and stuffed envelopes. Some students participated in a braille writing test. One of the teachers, Stacie Shearer, created some tactile symbols for our students who are deafblind to use during the office task of relaying a message to another person. The Jobard game was just at the right level for our middle and high school students and they seemed to enjoy it.

After the tables were set, desserts made, and the other events finished, pizza was served for lunch with the parfaits the students had made. Each student received a prize for their participa-

tion in the event and willingness to attempt new tasks. The prizes were chosen for each student by his or her Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment before the event, and were presented with a “Mission Accomplished” certificate to each student. Each of the prizes could relate to vocational use as well as being fun.

Overall, the event was a success. Our sponsors included our local Aaron’s Rent to Own which provided the furniture for the hotel room, and the Texarkana and Tyler offices of the Division of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Division for Blind Services (DBS) who covered the cost of prizes and food.

Next year we hope to include more students. The first year we felt we needed to keep it simple. Now that we know how it “looks” we can invite more students to participate, something we are very eager to do!

## **Initiatives in Grass-roots Training for Professionals Working with Students with Multiple and Visual Impairments, Including Deafblindness.**

Chris Montgomery, Education Specialist, Texas Deafblind Project, TSBVI and Sara Kitchen, Education Specialist, Outreach, Texas School for the Blind and Visually impaired

**Abstract:** the authors describe the “Believe” and “Great Expectations” team leadership initiatives, where selected educational teams receive intensive training as they work to become leaders in providing services to students with visual and multiple impairments, including deafblindness.

**Keywords:** Effective Practices, leadership, training initiative, MIVI, deafblindness

The team leadership program started as an outgrowth of a Texas Deafblind Project grant initiative in 2009. We planned to target teams around the state for whom we could provide intensive training in deafblindness over a two-year period. The goal was to have highly-trained “super teams” that could, in turn, provide support to other teams in their area. In addition, these highly-trained teams could be invited to make presenta-

tions at the Texas Symposium on Deafblindness, write articles for *TX SenseAbilities*, or contribute to other local or regional trainings. The Deafblind Outreach team worked to collaborate with the TSBVI Outreach team for students with visual impairment to combine forces, and expand our efforts to teams working both with students with deafblindness (DB), and those who have visual impairment and additional disabilities (MI/VI).

We contacted regional specialists at the Education Service Centers (ESC's) in Regions 4 (the Houston area) and 6 (Huntsville and surrounding counties) and presented our ideas. "Believe in MI/VI" was born in Region 4, made up of five area teams working with a student with deafblindness or MI/VI. In Region 6 there are two regional teams in "Great Expectations". The two-year project in both of these areas is designed to provide teams with knowledge, skills and strategies to develop appropriate and effective interventions for students with multiple and visual impairments, including deafblindness. Each team consists of up to five members: the teacher of students with visual impairments, the classroom teacher, and, if the student is deafblind, the teacher of students with auditory impairments were required to be part of the team. Two or three other team members are included, such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists, or interveners. An emphasis was also placed on bringing in the parents as an integral part of the team.

Over the course of the two year period Outreach, in collaboration with ESC's 4 and 6, will provide and a series of five one day workshops. Each team also had a total of two visits from either Outreach or ESC specialists. These visits were designed to demonstrate and implement concepts and strategies taught during the workshop.

Workshop topics have included "Introduction and Teaming", "Communication Systems", and "Assessment to IEP". For the 2010-2011 school year, workshops are based on participant feedback. An internet wiki was established to provide a hub for long distance information sharing. In addition to providing an outlet for team discussion and feedback, the wiki includes video, links to articles, and web resources.

In both regions teams agreed to actively participate in all training sessions during both years of the project, complete homework activities and implementation plans, and implement research-based teaching strategies, including developing and videotaping three functional routines, and implementing a calendar system with their students. Teams have been asked to use assessments that will help in development of an individualized education plan (IEP) appropriate to their student's needs. Our overall focus is: what are we going to be teaching this student and how will this lead to a fulfilling life after they have left school?

As in any pilot project, we are still learning. Because of teacher workloads, and other conflicts,



we were forced to schedule our first on-site visit months after we gave our initial training. What we have learned is that a visit should be scheduled much closer to the initial training in order to help with homework, answer questions, and model strategies. We have found it is often hard for teams to make the leap from seeing video examples and hearing lecture to directly applying the strategies with their child. Having someone to help guide and demonstrate the practice seems integral to the process.



We designed WIKI sites to be used as a distance-learning model. However, they have had some start-up snags as well. We found that servers for schools and educational offices block some sites, and permission must be given to access the wiki and it's video examples. Our intent for the WIKI was to allow people to discuss topics and share ideas when it is convenient for them. Everyone can get in on the discussion. We believe we can make it into a successful learning tool for our teams.

As we make our way through our two year cycle, everyone is making progress and we are excited to see where our students will be at the end of year two. Despite some of the start-up problems we've encountered, we are sure to call this project a success.

## That New Building Smell

By William Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: Superintendent William Daugherty describes the new construction progress and the experience of moving into new buildings.*

*Key Words: blind, deafblind, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, TSBVI, construction,*

Approximately three weeks behind schedule, with the start of school looming large, TSBVI made the move into its new Main Education Building last July. With all new furniture coming, we basically walked away from the old Main Building leaving many decades of accumulated desks, chairs, file cabinets and shelves behind. The atmosphere in the abandoned building quickly went from tired to sad to a bit creepy. When all the life leaves a building it quickly changes its character, and this old building has had a lot of life go through it since 1917. Before it finally comes down, it's good to know that schools, state agencies and other not-for-profit organizations will have come in and carted off most of its contents for use elsewhere.

Getting into a wonderful new building is part joy and part headache. The details of fixing all the little things, and some big ones, seem to go on forever. But a new campus is a rare gift, and we have our eye on the prize—in a little over a year and a half all of the construction will be over. The New TSBVI

will then have the facilities to match the quality of its programs and services. As for our students—they just wanted to know when the new pool was going to open. The answer was, “soon.” Our new had pool flooded in a recent deluge. That could be looked at as sort of ironic, but that was certainly lost on the guys that had to clean it up.

*Those of us who have the privilege of working at TSBVI at this particular time can be compared to the group that moved over from the old campus in 1917. From the official records back in the day it says “Such an experience can only be understood by those who have lived through it”.*

Our Outreach team has moved into their new space, and it is great to have them back on campus after a year in a leased building just north of the school. Four more new buildings are about to start up and with each comes a new set of challenges on how kids will get around campus, where the staff parking will grow or shrink, and what undiscovered underground utilities can be severed by big machines. It is hard to imagine there is a wire or a pipe that has not already been busted, per-

haps twice, but somehow we keep hitting them with pinpoint accuracy. As much history as there is in our old buildings, the ground below them certainly matches that. We've dug up old steam

pipe still wrapped in the wooden sleeves used for insulation in the original construction.

What we at TSBVI are best at is teaching students or helping others who do the same across the state. But we have become de facto construction managers as we plan new facilities to best meet the needs of our students and staff, and then, after occupancy, work through the seemingly endless corrective measures. Those of us who have the privilege of working at TSBVI at this particular time can be compared to the group that moved

over from the old campus in 1917. From the official records back in the day it says “Such an experience can only be understood by those who have lived through it”. We are already at work on some new history here at TSBVI, and despite all the trials and tribulations, the smiles about our good fortune far outweigh the grumbling on almost everything but where to park. Come visit the school that belongs to all of us in Texas who are interested in visual impairment—we have six parking spaces reserved for you right up front.

## The DARS Blind Children’s Program Aims High

by Barbara J. Madrigal, Assistant Commissioner, Division for Blind Services

*Abstract: this article discusses the Blind Children’s Program statewide assessment project.*

*Key Words: blind, visually impaired, DARS-Division for Blind Services, DBS, Blind Children’s Program, Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program, program evaluation*

Our motto here at DARS-Division for Blind Services is E3: Excellent Service, Every Customer, Every Time. And our aim is to provide E3 services in a consistent manner across the state. Everyone, whether you live in Dime Box or Dallas, in Sweetwater or San Antonio, should receive the same type and quality of services. The Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program wants to know – are we providing E3 services consistently across the state?

To find the answer to that question, we are initiating a statewide assessment project. We would like to find out what is working well in the field, and we want to find out where our staff needs additional training or support.

Our Statewide Field Specialists, Gay Speake and Al’An Kesler, have a combined 28 years experi-

ence with the Blind Children’s Program, with the majority of that time spent as Blind Children’s specialists. They will be travelling to each office to work with every Blind Children’s specialist for 1 ½ to 2 days. For each caseload, the Field Specialists are gathering information from four different sources: a field observation (home visit), a parent survey to every family in active services, a survey of our partners, and a documentation review of ten randomly selected cases.

They will accompany each specialist on a home visit to observe specific skill areas, including planning and preparation for the visit, relationship with the family, knowledge of the program, effective interviewing skills, and effective listening skills.

In addition to the home visit, the Blind Children’s Program is sending a parent survey to every family

in active services. When you receive this survey, we would very much appreciate your feedback on the services that you and your child are receiving. This will help us to better meet the needs of families who have children who are blind and visually impaired. The survey should take less than five minutes to complete, and the information you provide is completely anonymous.

The parent survey evaluates three areas: customer services, specialist knowledge and ability, and the parent's perception of the value of the services. Among other things, the questions address the specialist's accessibility and responsiveness, follow-through on agreements, knowledge about the needs of your child and collaborative relationships with other professionals working with you and your child.

The partner survey will be sent in the next few months to our educational and professional partners, including Teachers of the Visually Impaired, VI Consultants, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Physical and Occupational Therapists, ECI Coordinators, and any other professionals who partner with us. The survey will be on Survey Monkey and will be sent by email, with an invitation to forward to anyone who has direct working knowledge of DBS Children's Program staff and services. This survey includes both the Blind Children's Program and the Transition Program, and it seeks information about our partner's perceptions of consistency of services, professionalism of staff, collaboration with others, and program knowledge.

When you receive this survey, we would very much appreciate your feedback about our services. This will help us better meet the needs of our consumers and to identify the training and support needs of our staff. Again, the information is completely anonymous. If you would like to be sure to receive a survey, please email [beth.dennis@dars.state.tx.us](mailto:beth.dennis@dars.state.tx.us).

The last part of the statewide assessment project is a documentation review of ten randomly selected cases. Case reviews are a standard operating procedure in our agency, but seldom have we done ten comprehensive case reviews at one time. This provides a good sample of the work completed by a specialist and allows the reviewer to determine overall trends. Most trends are a result of misinformation about how to do something, lack of knowledge or skill in how to do something, or broken or missing system(s) that creates inconsistencies in application of procedures.

This comprehensive program assessment provides our staff information about what they are doing well. So far what we have found is that all of our staff has certain areas where they shine and areas that need improvement. This process offers a way to recognize people for their strengths and talents as well as identify areas that need support and development.

We know that the excellence we seek is dependent upon a skilled and knowledgeable work force. Thank you for your invaluable input into this process!

*Everyone, whether you live in Dime Box or Dallas, in Sweetwater or San Antonio, should receive the same type and quality of services. The Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program wants to know – are we providing E3 services consistently across the state?*

## High School Diploma Within Reach at Hadley

By Billy T. Brookshire, Outreach Coordinator, Hadley School for the Blind, Austin, TX

*Abstract: this article describes the accredited High School Program available through Hadley School for the Blind*

*Key Words: blind, deafblind, Hadley School for the Blind, accredited high school program, diploma, DARS Division for Blind Services, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Graduate Texas Initiative*

A teacher with the Colorado School for the Blind and Deaf recently emailed Hadley with a thank you for helping one of her students earn a high school diploma. She noted, "My student had enrolled in an online school last fall to obtain some high school credit, and things unraveled quickly and it didn't look like that would work. We tried to set up a distance learning course in braille, and the next day I wondered why we were attempting to create a course when I knew Hadley existed for this purpose!"

Since the 1930s, The Hadley School for the Blind has offered an accredited High School Program to students with visual impairments age 14 and up who live in the United States. Hadley customizes a student's high school program to his or her needs, and instructors and student services representatives are available for support via e-mail and a toll-free phone number. Learning materials are accessible in a variety of formats including braille, large print and audio and online, and students study at home, at their own pace. Best of all, courses are free of charge to people with visual impairments.

Like the student from Colorado, many turn to Hadley because they have had challenges fulfilling high school requirements through their local school district. According to the American Foundation for the Blind, five million people with visual impairments over the age of 25 have not com-

pleted their high school degree. To help students obtain the skills they need to succeed, Hadley not only fulfills the requirements for a diploma but offers award-winning braille instruction and courses focused on access technology and independent living skills, among others. Students may receive their diploma directly from Hadley or they may apply Hadley course credits toward graduation from their local high school. Homeschoolers can also supplement their educational program with courses from Hadley. Students who complete Hadley's High School Program are invited to a commencement ceremony each June in Winnetka, Illinois, where the school is headquartered. Hadley even pays the travel expenses.

In Texas, Hadley is collaborating with DARS Division for Blind Services and the Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired on a "Graduate Texas Initiative" to reach out to anyone desiring a High School Diploma in Texas. We are looking at the possibility of holding the graduation ceremony right here in Texas. If you know of anyone who might be interested in completing their High School Diploma, please contact Billy Brookshire, Hadley Texas Outreach, at 512-565-9690 or email [bbrookshire@austin.rr.com](mailto:bbrookshire@austin.rr.com) for more information. And please encourage all teachers, counselors, or others who work with blind or visually impaired high school students to visit [www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu) or call 800-323-4238 for a more detailed description of the Hadley High School Program.

# Seedlings Braille Books for Children Adds 9 New Books to their Catalog

## Seedlings Braille Books Press Release

*Abstract: Seedlings Braille Books for Children announces the addition of new books in their catalogue.*

*Key Words: blindness, deafness, Braille, literacy, pre-reading skills, Seedlings Braille books*

Seedlings Braille Books for Children is a Michigan-based nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting braille literacy among children who are blind by providing access to some of the same literature that is available to their sighted peers. Access and affordability of braille literature is of the highest importance to blind readers of all ages. Seedlings' new 2010 catalog has over 1000 low-cost titles available.

An ongoing project of Seedlings Braille Books for Children is to reach more visually impaired children in their preschool years in order to have a positive impact on pre-reading skills. A foundation for literacy and the love of reading is developed through early exposure to good books. Seedlings Braille Books for Children provides Print-Braille-&-Picture books for preschoolers facilitating early exposure to braille through the tactile page as sighted family members read the print. By feeling the raised bumps of braille while a sighted person reads a story, a blind child begins to associate those bumps with wonderful stories and an enjoyable experience.

The following are new books that Seedlings has just released.

### **PRINT-BRAILLE-&-PICTURE BOOKS:**

Clifford's Noisy Day by Norman Bridwell \$4.00  
(uncontracted)

Little Feet Love by Piggy Toes Press \$8.00  
(uncontracted)

Numbers by Scholastic \$5.00 (uncontracted)

Are You My Mommy? by Mae Brown \$8.00

Biscuit's Pet & Play Christmas by Alyssa Satin Capucilli \$7.00

A Good Day by Kevin Henkes \$8.00

It's Spring! by Samantha Berger & Pamela Chanko \$6.00

Wake Up, Little Ones by Piggy Toes Press \$11.00

Where Is Love, Biscuit? By Alyssa Satin Capucilli \$7.00

Seedlings Braille Books for Children serves blind children from birth to age 14 and blind adults who read to sighted children throughout the United States and in over 75 countries around the world. For more information about Seedlings Braille Books for Children, visit [www.seedlings.org](http://www.seedlings.org) or contact Therese Vick, Community Outreach Coordinator, 14151 Farmington Road, Livonia, MI 48154; Phone: 800-777-8552 or 734-427-8552; E-mail: [seedlink7@ameritech.net](mailto:seedlink7@ameritech.net)

## Family Guide to Assistive Technology and Transition Planning

Excerpt from The Family Center on Technology and Disability webpage

*Abstract: this article describes a booklet about assistive technology and transition planning.*

*Key Words: blindness, deafblind, assistive technology, transition planning, Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD)*

The FAMILY GUIDE TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSITION PLANNING Published by the Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD), this 50 page guide is aimed at providing families with the information they need to

effectively prepare for and participate in periods of transition in their children's lives. The Guide is available in both English and Spanish. For more information go to [http://www.fctd.info/show/fig\\_summary](http://www.fctd.info/show/fig_summary)

## NIU Announces Certification in Deaf-Blind Rehabilitation

Excerpt from Northern Illinois University website <[www.chhs.niu.edu/rc/dbr/default.asp](http://www.chhs.niu.edu/rc/dbr/default.asp)>

*Abstract: this article describes a certification program at NIU for deaf-blind rehabilitation.*

*Key Words: blindness, deafblindness, Northern Illinois University, Helen Keller National Center, deaf-blind certification, rehabilitation*

Northern Illinois University's School of Allied Health and Communicative Disorders, housed within the College of Health and Human Sciences, offers a unique program designed to provide quality continuing education to the rehabilitation professional who wishes to enhance his or her skills in providing quality services to persons who are deaf-blind. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration .

Participants may earn 15 semester hours of academic credit at either the undergraduate or

graduate level. Training begins with an intensive three-week institute on the Northern Illinois University campus, located 65 miles west of Chicago. Students then enroll in a distance-learning component of the course that is completed during the second semester of study.

The goal of the program is to impact significantly the delivery of rehabilitation services to persons who are deaf-blind by assisting rehabilitation professionals to be knowledgeable concerning the unique considerations of providing quality and accessible services to this population.

# Some Things That Crossed My Desk

By Beth Dennis, DARS-DBS Blind Children's Program Consultant

Abstract: this article is a collection of resources.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, deafblind explorers, travel, scholarships,

As the consultant for the DARS Blind Children's Program, one of my responsibilities is to send resources to all the Blind Children's specialists across the state. Below is a smattering of resources that have crossed my desk in the past few months.

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK, FROM ESC REGION 18 <<http://framework.esc18.net>>

The Legal Framework is a web-based, continuously updated guide to special education in Texas. It is maintained by Region 18 Service Center and provides an overall guide to the special education process in an easy-to-read and easy-to-understand format. It contains the most current federal and state laws, and it is useful for parents, school districts and anyone else who needs to know about the special education process.

It is available in English or Spanish, and text or graphic. When reading the Legal Framework, some text is in black and some blue. Black wording means the documents are required; blue wording means the action or process is required.

There are also links to other documents: The Notice of Procedural Safeguards (English and Spanish), the Side by Side view of Special Education Rules and Regulations (this is text directly from legal sources and is not available in Spanish), and A Guide to the Admission, Review and Dismissal Process (English and Spanish).

## DEAF-BLIND EXPLORERS

[www.deafblindexplorers.org/AboutUs.aspx](http://www.deafblindexplorers.org/AboutUs.aspx)

The Deaf-Blind Explorers is an international organization dedicated to providing traveling and tour-

ing experiences for deaf-blind people all over the world. Deaf-Blind Explorers provides the unique experience of exploring other destinations that otherwise may not be available to deaf-blind individuals due to their multiple impairments. Deaf-Blind Explorers strives to expand their members' horizons by educating non-disable people and showing them how a deaf-blind person can enjoy the same benefits as anyone else as they explore the world without any barriers or limitations.

D-BE strives to raise awareness of the needs of travelers with any degree of Deaf-Blindness, to remove barriers to access and to expand travel opportunities anywhere in the world.

DEAF-BLIND EXPLORERS, INC. consists of people who are Deaf-Blind and Hearing-Visually impaired and know best how to speak for themselves. D-BE focuses on travel plans, both domestic and international, for Deaf-Blind and Hearing-Visually impaired travelers. Travel arrangements are designed to meet the special needs of these travelers and to provide an educational experience unavailable on regularly scheduled Hearing / Sighted trips. Each D-BE trip offers a unique opportunity for tactile experiences, hands-on encounters, on-site interpreters, readings and visual descriptions, which all combined provides total sensory and intellectual enjoyment. Additionally, these excursions offer unique opportunities for relaxation and socialization with others who share the desire for travel and adventure.

DEAF-BLIND EXPLORERS, INC. (D-BE) believe that travel should be provided at an affordable price, have the necessary accommodations, and provide Service Support Providers (SSP)

and Interpreters. All travel encounters must involve both a positive outlook and an upbeat atmosphere. Travel ought to broaden our horizons and at the same time, challenge the biases of our most cherished culture. Travel will cause others to rethink their views or perspectives of Deaf-Blindness and help them to better understand who we really are. D-BE invites you to join them on one of their travel plans. Sighted, hearing, or Deaf friends, colleagues or family members may accompany participants or consumers.

### **SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DEAF, HEARING IMPAIRED, AND HEARING LOSS**

[www.disaboom.com/scholarships/deaf-hearing-loss-hearing-impaired-scholarships](http://www.disaboom.com/scholarships/deaf-hearing-loss-hearing-impaired-scholarships)

Scholarships for deaf students are an important first step to a college degree and a rewarding job. Colleges and universities now provide adaptations for deaf or hard of hearing students; these scholarships will help knock down that last – financial – obstacle. This website provides a list of available scholarships for deaf and hearing impaired students, along with other information and resources for people with disabilities: <http://www.disaboom.com/scholarships/deaf-hearing-loss-hearing-impaired-scholarships>.

### **DISABILITY RESOURCES.ORG**

[www.disabilityresources.org/KIDS.html](http://www.disabilityresources.org/KIDS.html)

Disability Resources.org provides a wealth of information and resources on disability. This particular page describes websites for, by and about kids with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

### **MOMS MEETING MOMS**

[www.momsincommon.org/index.html](http://www.momsincommon.org/index.html)

This website has been created for parents, especially moms, of children with multiple medical and developmental issues. The webhost works as a developmental specialist with infants and toddlers in a local early intervention program specializing in children with significant medical conditions. In her 18+ years of experience, she has noticed that moms need other moms to talk to. Moms of children with multiple issues have limited resources

for support. There is typically no local support groups that fit ‘our kids’. Moms have limited time to attend support groups that do exist. She wanted this site to be a place for parents of ‘our kids’ to talk about their experiences. This is not a support group but a place of stories both good and bad. This is a place to share realistic everyday life dealing with special needs. Her goal is for moms not to feel so alone out there.

There are several topics for discussion listed on the side of each page. The website invites you to click on a topic to tell your story, to tell as much or as little as you wish to share (if your story is long you may need to use more than one comment box). It is suggested that you use nicknames or initials for you and your child since this is a public site and anyone can view it. The webhost emphasizes that the topics are just a way to organize this site and to not let these headings be limiting. If your story does not fit under a certain heading, please contact the webhost and she will add another heading. She also encourages everyone to respond to other stories but please be supportive and positive. There is also a page of resources/links and suggested readings. If you have a link or a suggestion please add it.

### **TELEPHONE SUPPORT GROUP FOR SPANISH SPEAKING PARENTS**

[www.familyconnect.org/news.asp?AnnouncementID=795](http://www.familyconnect.org/news.asp?AnnouncementID=795)

In January, 2010, the Children’s Vision Health Initiative, a program sponsored by the Jewish Guild for the Blind, began a telephone support group in Spanish for parents of children who are blind and visually impaired from around the country. The support group will be facilitated by a Spanish-speaking Social Worker and open to all Spanish-speaking parents free of charge. In addition to providing an opportunity to speak with other parents on a weekly basis, the support group will invite guest speakers from the medical, educational and rehabilitation fields to call in and answer parent’s questions. If you would like to register for this support group please call Awilda Jackanin, LCSW, at (718)781-7775 or [liljack@nyc.rr.com](mailto:liljack@nyc.rr.com)

**FAMILY CONNECT ARTICLES NOW AVAILABLE IN SPANISH**

[www.familyconnect.org/parentsitehome.asp?lang=esp](http://www.familyconnect.org/parentsitehome.asp?lang=esp)

Family Connect now has more than 300 articles available in Spanish, thanks to funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Follow the “en español” link on FamilyConnect’s home page – right next to the search field – to check

out the Spanish-language version, or simply go to [www.familyconnect.org/Spanish](http://www.familyconnect.org/Spanish). The support for Spanish content is database-driven, which allows the FamilyConnect template to generate a “Read this article in English” link or “Leer este artículo en español” link, as appropriate. The template also supplies the correct language tags so that screenreader users will hear the words pronounced correctly.

**Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired – Outreach Program Honors**

**TEXAS FELLOWS**

*Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters*



**Texas Fellow**

- Carol Rimka
- Tressie Schindler
- Sara Baker
- Theresa Taylor
- Kathy Krenek
- Karla Cantu
- Tashia Garcia
- Lani Simonton
- Brian Jones
- Emma Lee Wilson
- Mary Kainer
- Cecilia Cox Hayes
- Myleah Rhynes
- Pat Harper
- Barbara Kline
- Carol Dancy
- Bonnie Rudel

**Candidate**

- Elizabeth Meek
- Charlotte McKinney
- Stacy Vance
- Tammy Averitt
- Julie Stanfield
- Guadalupe Garza-Brown
- Karen Baker
- Cathryn King
- Trish Duke
- Harriet Page
- Kathleen McGann
- Gayla Brown
- Beth Wallace
- Shonda Prater
- Julia Sohns
- David Carabajal
- Norma Freimark



For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow or working as a VI professional contact KC Dignan at <kcd@tsbvi.edu>.

# BulletinBoard

Announcements / Regional, State, and National Training and Events

Mail or email your items for the Bulletin Board to Beth Bible:  
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756; or <bethbible@tsbvi.edu>.  
An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is posted at  
<[www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm)>.

## 2011 TAER

### “The Big Picture: Connecting the Dots”

March 24-26, 2011  
Sheraton Dallas North.

We are excited to announce that registration forms  
are now online as is hotel information.  
We look forward to seeing you in March!

[www.txaer.org](http://www.txaer.org)

Julie Prause, President and Christy Shepard, Treasurer



### Every Move Counts:

**Sensory-based Strategies for  
Identifying Appropriate Technological  
Interventions for Individuals with  
Severe and Profound Differences**

Jane Korsten, Independent Consultant

**April 13 & 14, 2011 – 9:00-4:00**

**Region 4 Education Service Center  
Houston, TX**

Session ID 649391; Registration Fee: \$100  
Credit: CPE 12, ASHA 1.1

Register for training at [www.theansweris4.net](http://www.theansweris4.net)  
Contact: Angela Standridge,  
[astandridge@esc4.net](mailto:astandridge@esc4.net)

### Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN) Statewide Conference

June 14-16, 2011  
Region 4 ESC  
Houston, TX

Region 4 ESC Contact:  
Kirk Behnke, [kbehnke@esc4.net](mailto:kbehnke@esc4.net)

Register for training at [www.theansweris4.net](http://www.theansweris4.net)

### Active Learning Conference Coming in June

Plans are in the works. To learn more, please  
contact: Gigi Newton <[GigiNewton@tsbvi.edu](mailto:GigiNewton@tsbvi.edu)>  
or Stacy Shafer <[StacyShafer@tsbvi.edu](mailto:StacyShafer@tsbvi.edu)>  
or watch for it at <[www.tsbvi.edu/outreach](http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach)>.

# Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

## TETN Broadcasts – Spring, 2011

**Using the EVALS Kit to Evaluate Areas of the Core and Expanded Core Curriculum**  
Feb 22nd – 10:30 AM-12:00 PM (TETN #8249)

**Self-Determination Through O&M**  
February 23rd - 1:30-3:30 PM (TETN #8011)

**Introduction to Voice Over: The MacOS Voice Output Screen Reading Software**  
March 9th - 1:30-3:30 PM (TETN #8012)

**Preparing Students with Deafblindness to Make Decisions and be Responsible Adults**  
March 23rd - 1:30-3:30 PM (TETN #8013)

**New Teacher Series: Impact of Visual Impairments on Language Development**  
March 31st - 1:30-4:00 PM (TETN #8014)

**Assessment and Programming for Students with Significant Multiple Impairments**  
April 27th - 1:30-3:30 PM (TETN #8124)

**Literacy and the Low Vision Student**  
May 4th - 1:30-4:00 PM (TETN #8015)

**CHARGE Syndrome**  
May 18th - 1:30-3:30 PM (TETN #8125)

For information and registration, visit:  
[www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/5/1237-tsbvi-outreach-staff](http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/5/1237-tsbvi-outreach-staff)

### Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Short-term Programs for Academic Students

- February 20–25 Junior Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 6-8)
- March 4–7\*\* City Travel for COMS and Their Students (secondary)
- April 7–10\*\* Elementary School Independence Weekend #2 (ages 9-11)
- April 14–19\*\* Capitol Experience: The Legislative Process Up Close (grades 8-12)
- April 28–May1\*\* Braille Olympics
- May 12–15\*\* High School Independence Weekend #2: Prom (grades 10-12)

\*\* Weekend Programs

Access = Needed by visually impaired students in order to access the core curriculum. Goals for Access to Academics classes are individualized by request, and could include areas such as technology, tactile graphics, math or science tools, ILS, and other areas from the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Referrals to Short-Term Program classes must come from the local school district. Students may attend more than one class. Parents can learn more by contacting their child's local teacher of the visually impaired, or by calling the principal of the TSBVI Short-Term Programs.

To find out more or begin the referral process, go to: <[www.tsbvi.edu/school/special](http://www.tsbvi.edu/school/special)>. Lauren Newton, Principal, Special Programs; 512-206-9119; [newtonl@tsbvi.edu](mailto:newtonl@tsbvi.edu)

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Outreach Program  
1100 W. 45th Street  
Austin, TX 78756

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## TX SenseAbilities

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Austin, Texas 78756

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please call Beth Bible at (512) 206-9103 or email <bethbible@tsbvi.edu>.

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### Production Staff

#### Editor-in-Chief

David Wiley (512) 206-9219  
<davidwiley@tsbvi.edu>

#### Editor's Assistant

Beth Bible (512) 206-9103  
<bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

#### DARS-DBS Editor

Beth Dennis (512) 377-0578  
<Beth.Dennis@dars.state.tx.us>

#### Website Editor

Jim Allan (512) 206-9315  
<jimallan@tsbvi.edu>

#### Spanish Edition Editor

Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418  
<jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>

#### Braille Transcriber

B.J. Cepeda (512) 377-0665  
<Bj.cepeda@dars.state.tx.us>

### Section Editors

#### Family Editor

Edgenie Bellah (512) 206-9423  
<edgeniebellah@tsbvi.edu>  
Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418  
<jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>

#### Programming Editors

Stacy Shafer (512) 206-9140  
<stacyshafer@tsbvi.edu>  
Holly Cooper (512) 206-9217  
<hollycooper@tsbvi.edu>

#### News and Views

Beth Dennis (512) 377-0578  
<Beth.Dennis@dars.state.tx.us>

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