

# TX SenseAbilities

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

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*The new elementary building on the TSBVI campus is nearing completion*

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT OF THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND  
THE DARS DIVISION FOR BLIND SERVICES

# Meet Your Family Organizations

Jean Robinson and Edgenie Bellah,  
TSBVI Outreach Family Support and Training Specialists

*Abstract: Learn about organizations at the national and state level that are for families with children who have disabilities, including visual impairments and deafblindness.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, family organizations, disabilities, visual impairment, blindness, deafblindness, peer support, connections, advocacy.*

Texans are fond of the saying, “It ain’t bragging if it’s true!” Well, Texas claims the right to do some serious bragging that our state is home to strong, ever growing, and active family organizations. Not only should we be proud that we have so many, but thankful that they lead our community in making services, supports, and connections the best they can be for individuals who are visually impaired and deafblind.

On March 7, 2012, we had the pleasure of facilitating a TETN that highlighted many of these family organizations. Since the best way to learn about each organization is to interact with its members, the TETN featured video interviews of board members describing each organization. Through these videos, educators who serve children with vision impairments gained insight into the importance of these organizations to families and the impact they have on public policy. Participants were reminded that research continues to identify that connection of parent-to-parent, sibling-to-sibling and grandparent-to-grandparent is perhaps the most beneficial and powerful support families benefit from. These videos will be posted on each organization’s website as well as the TSBVI one.

While everyone in our Texas community partners to spread the word about these organizations, there are still families that are unaware that they can become part of welcoming, active and family-centered organizations. For this reason, we’re dedicating the majority of the Spring 2012 Family Wisdom section to introducing you to your family organizations. We encourage you to visit with them, attend their events and become involved. Not only will your family benefit but our community will too!

## National



*NAPVI Logo*

### **National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments**

NAPVI is a national, non-profit, independent organization that enables parents to find information and resources for their children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. NAPVI provides leadership, support, and training to assist parents in helping their children reach their full potential. NAPVI is dedicated to:

Giving emotional support

Parent education

Initiating outreach programs

Networking

Advocating for the educational needs and welfare of children who are blind or visually impaired

P.O. Box 317

Watertown, MA 02471

Local Telephone: (617) 972-7441

Toll Free: (800) 562-6265

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

[napvi@perkins.org](mailto:napvi@perkins.org)

FamilyConnect: [www.familyconnect.org/parentsitewhome.asp](http://www.familyconnect.org/parentsitewhome.asp)



*NFADB Logo*

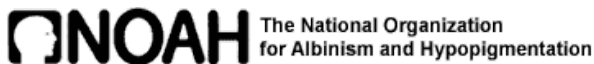
### **National Family Association for Deaf-Blind**

The National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) is a nonprofit 501(c) 3, volunteer-based organization that has served families since 1994. NFADB is the largest network of families focused on deaf-blindness. Originally started by and for families of individuals who are deaf-blind, our membership is now extended to any person or organization that desires to support individuals and families who are deafblind.

We are all in this community together!

Visit us on the web at [www.nfadb.org](http://www.nfadb.org) and on Facebook

For questions, please call Lori at 1-800-255-0411 or [NFADB@aol.com](mailto:NFADB@aol.com)



*NOAH logo*

### **NOAH: The National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation**

PO Box 959, East Hampstead, NH

03826-0959

Phone: 800 473-2310 (US and Canada)

Phone: 603 887-2310

<http://www.albinism.org>

### **South Texas NOAH chapter**

Monica Blancas  
[stx@albinism.org](mailto:stx@albinism.org)  
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### **North Texas NOAH chapter**

Cyd Frazier  
[gccfrazier@yahoo.com](mailto:gccfrazier@yahoo.com)  
[dfwalbinism@yahoogroups.com](mailto:dfwalbinism@yahoogroups.com)



*PACER logo*

### **PACER Center**

The mission of PACER Center (**P**arent **A**dvocacy **C**oalition for **E**ducational **R**ights) is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of [parents helping parents](#).

Founded in 1977, PACER Center was created by parents of children and youth with disabilities to help other parents and families facing similar challenges. Today, PACER Center expands opportunities and enhances the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families. PACER is staffed primarily by parents of children with disabilities and works in coalition with 18 disability organizations.

With assistance to individual families, workshops, materials for parents and professionals, and leadership in securing a free and appropriate public education for all children, PACER's work affects and encourages families in Minnesota and across the nation.

Visit the PACER Center on the web at [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) or on Facebook

## Texas: General



*PRN logo*

### Partners Resource Network

Partners Resource Network (PRN) is a non-profit agency that operates the statewide network of federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers (PTI's) in Texas. The PTI Projects are: [PATH](#), [PEN](#), and [TEAM](#).

The programs and services of PRN are based on the concept of parents helping parents. Our mission is to empower parents of children and youth with disabilities in their roles as parents, decision makers, and advocates for their children and to promote partnerships among parents and professionals.

Our web site is designed to provide timely information and to link the visitor with other resources in Texas and the nation. Our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of infants, toddlers, children and young adults with disabilities and their families who live in the great State of Texas.

1090 Longfellow Drive, Suite B  
Beaumont, TX 77706  
Phone: 409-898-4684  
TX Parents Only: 1-800-866-4726

Fax: 409-898-4869  
Email: [partnersresource@sbcglobal.net](mailto:partnersresource@sbcglobal.net)  
Website: [www.partnerstx.org](http://www.partnerstx.org)



*Family to Family logo*

## **Family to Family Network**

The mission of Family to Family Network is to help families of children with disabilities by providing information, training, referral and support

13150 FM 529, Suite 106

Houston, TX 77041

713.466.6304

713.466.6319 fax

[familytofamily@sbcglobal.net](mailto:familytofamily@sbcglobal.net)



**Texas Parent to Parent**

*Texas Parent to Parent logo*

## **Texas Parent to Parent**

Texas Parent to Parent is a state-wide non-profit organization that provides support to families of children with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and other special health care needs by empowering their families to be advocates for them through peer support, resource referral and public awareness.

3710 Cedar Street, Box 12

Austin, Texas 78705

866-896-6001 (T/F)

512-451-3110 (fax)

[www.txp2p.org](http://www.txp2p.org)

## Texas: Visual Impairment



*TAPVI logo*

### **Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments**

TAPVI is an affiliate of NAPVI. We are a non-profit organization that provides support to the families of children who have blindness or visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities.

TAPVI enables families to find information and resources, as well as connect and network with one another. We offer leadership, support, and training to assist families in helping children reach their full potential in school and in the community.

Isela Wilson, President, E-mail: [iselawilson@yahoo.com](mailto:iselawilson@yahoo.com) or (956) 778-1142  
[www.familyconnect.org/directory.asp?Action=profile&AccountID=4781](http://www.familyconnect.org/directory.asp?Action=profile&AccountID=4781)  
[www.spedex.com/napvi/chapters.html#5](http://www.spedex.com/napvi/chapters.html#5)



*Texas Parents of Blind Children logo*

### **Texas Parents of Blind Children**

Texas Parents of Blind Children (TPOBC) is the state chapter of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC), a division of the NFB of Texas, a national membership organization of parents and friends of blind children.

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## Why Family Organizations Matter – A Parent’s Food for Thought

Michele Chauvin, parent, Houston Texas

*Abstract: A parent shares her thoughts on why it is important to be involved in family organizations and attend training.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent support, family organizations, training, connections, systems change/improvement*

*Editor's Note: The following is an email response Michele sent to another parent after their conversation regarding the benefits of being connected with family organizations. We thought it an ideal companion to the lead article, Meet Your Family Organizations, and appreciate the parent's willingness to share with our readers.*

During the past decade, being connected with family support groups in Texas geared specifically towards children with visual impairments has been a vital component of my support system and Lauren's progress. Over the years, other VI families who are members of various statewide parent groups (TAPVI, TPOBC, DBMAT, Texas Chargers) have shared information with me and helped connect me with resources available to VI families. I consider these families not only friends, but like another family for me. We get together at trainings and outside of trainings for coffee, dinner, play dates, birthday parties, etc. Five years ago, one of the TAPVI families shared the information with me about our Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) tele-support group, when it first formed. Without that connection, I may not have heard about the ROP group call or shared this information with other families.

I can only imagine the isolation VI families might have felt 40 or 50 years ago, before parent groups existed. I often hear blind adults share how isolated their parents were, and how isolated they felt growing up. Today there are local activities through DARS Division for Blind Services, The Lighthouses, and regional Educational Service Centers in Texas, as well as family organizations and TSBVI Outreach. Activities we have attended or have heard about from other families include beeping egg hunts, VI family tactile tour days at the zoo, tandem bike rides, group swim lessons, sailing trips, therapeutic horseback riding, sensory holiday celebrations, Sports Extravaganza, focused skills workshops for kids, summer camps, etc. All of these exist because parents and professionals came together, developed creative ideas, tried new things, and made these a reality.

Another benefit of families connecting through parent groups is systems change. As you have seen the challenges in your area, so it goes around the state and the country. We can work both ends of the issues by working towards positive change with our professional partners. This can be done at all levels. It can happen locally for your child and others within your local school districts. We can also work together at the state and national levels to effect similar changes on a broader scale. This is

one area where parent and adult groups focus their attention and challenge the system towards a better tomorrow for people with visual impairments of all ages. That is why I find it exciting to be a part of the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT). Parents are vital partners of AVIT so please consider joining us in our efforts. You can learn more about AVIT at [alliancevitexans.org](http://alliancevitexans.org)

I have learned a lot over the years by attending professional and parent conferences related to visual impairment, as well as special education in general. Often the same speakers attend and facilitate these trainings nationwide. Our children have such a low incidence disability, and the network of VI families and professionals who are active is small and closely knit. I enjoy making those connections and knowing what is happening, especially being part of systems change that affects our child and our family. That is why I'm an active member of the Texas Education of Blind and VI Students Advisory Committee, which created the Guidelines and Standards document posted on the TSBVI and TEA websites. One subcommittee of this group is working on social skills, and their latest project is Social Skills Cinema: Lessons for the Real World

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/component/content/article/3354-cinema> (short video clips and contest winners). This will help us produce wonderful ideas for teaching our children with visual impairments social skills.

There are no perfect people. Any time two or more are gathered together, there will be differences of opinion. This is inevitable. Though it may sometimes impede progress, having people with different styles and ideas often produces more interesting and innovative results because we're able to draw upon everyone's strengths and learn from each other.

A final thought on being an active family within the VI community. When searching for a new physician, therapist, or specialist of any sort, I often look at both their credentials and their professional affiliations. I want to know if that person is not only certified or licensed to do what they do, but also that they are connected with others in their field and engaged in continuing education. I would not want to take my daughter to a professional who was disconnected from others in their field. For me, this is one of the many reasons I have joined VI parent groups, as well as participated in conferences. Each professional serving my daughter is a tool in her toolbox. I am the project manager, responsible for making sure she has all the tools. My long-term goal is for my daughter to become her own project manager where she can build toward a life she finds meaningful and enjoyable. That is my hope for all of our children with visual impairments. Some children may need ongoing help from a support system. We are leaving the possibilities open ended for our daughter, when considering personal independence. For now, we share that responsibility with her, and we just do our best each day in any given moment with whatever circumstances we face.

I hope you consider this a friendly explanation of my personal experiences connecting with VI parent groups and professionals and attending conferences. It is just food for thought.

## JD Excels at the 2011 Sports Extravaganza

David "Doc" Bowdoin and Amanda Bowdoin, parents, Waxahachie

*Abstract: Parents share their reflections of their son's experience with the 2011 Sports Extravaganza for the Blind and Visually Impaired.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, sports, Expanded Core Curriculum, Charge syndrome*

Sports Extravaganza for Blind and Visually Impaired is sponsored by the Region 10 Education Service Center and Lions Clubs International District 2-X1 and 2-E2. This event is held every year and supported by Lions Clubs from around the areas through donations, sponsorships and volunteers. This year, our son JD participated in three events. While JD may not be a football player like his father, a Texas athletic trainer, dreamed of during the time we awaited our twins to be born, JD has gained so much more in our eyes, hope....encouragement and pride!

JD has Charge Syndrome and microtia atresia in both ears. CHARGE syndrome is a recognizable (genetic) pattern of birth defects which occurs in about one in every 9-10,000 births worldwide. It is an extremely complex syndrome, involving extensive medical and physical difficulties that differ from child to child. microtia is a birth deformity of the ear that occurs about one in 5,000-7,000 births and atresia is absence or underdevelopment of the ear canal and middle ear structures. JD has a moderate hearing loss and wears a BAHA (bone anchored hearing aid) implant device and has a visual impairment.

JD, who is a kindergartener, participated in three events at Sports Extravaganza: t-ball strike, tennis ball throw and the 25 meter walk. Seeing the look in JD's eyes was priceless and he was so happy about his accomplishments, especially as his twin sister encouraged him throughout the event. As a family we continue to cheer JD on and have shared vision for the opportunities in our future for him.



*Amanda, JD, and Olivia Bowdoin at the Sports Extravaganza 2011*



## TAPVI Talks

Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments

Jean Robinson, TAPVI Advisor

TAPVI was well represented at TAER and Texas Focus in March, 2012. Several TAPVI members participated in a panel facilitated by President, Isela Wilson. Each of them told how connecting with another parent made such a difference in their journey of raising a child with a visual impairment. Their stories were different but it was clear that the parent to parent bond gave extraordinary support to families that cannot be provided by professionals. This connection helps parents move forward and in turn helps professionals better serve children.

TAPVI welcomed about 40 family members and 8 professionals to the Family Social. Several families won door prizes. Raffle tickets were sold for a chance to win a gift basket filled with stress relief goodies. It was wonderful opportunity to visit old friends and to meet new ones.

TAPVI would like to invite you to consider joining their board. They are looking for parents and professionals who have a passion for helping parents of children with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, connect with other parents for support and find resources they need to make their child's life as fulfilling as possible.

TAPVI has a vision to connect every parent in our vast state so that no one ever feels that he or she is alone on this journey. Please consider either joining our effort by running for a seat on our board, nominating someone you believe would like to hold a position, or by volunteering to be an area representative for TAPVI in your area.

At least consider becoming a member of TAPVI. Your ideas and membership are important in raising awareness of the challenges you face each day. Elections will take place in June of this year and will be done electronically. Become a member so you can have a voice in reaching more families and professionals. Please contact Isela Wilson, President, to get more information. Her contact information is (956) 778-1142 cell and

[iselawilson@yahoo.com](mailto:iselawilson@yahoo.com)

## The Power of Siblings' Long-Standing Love

Jana Villemez, family consultant, Arkansas Department of Education  
Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments and Other Disabilities

*Reprinted with permission from the Winter 2012 CAYSI Newsletter*

*Abstract: An aunt shares her personal reflections after witnessing an interaction between her nieces that illustrates the value of sibling relationships for people with disabilities.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, sibling relationships, disabilities, self-determination, inclusive community.*

I had the opportunity to see the result of a family's siblings' long-standing love for each other this summer when my niece, Anna, got married. She was raised in a family with her sister Sara, now 26 years old, who has Prader Willis Syndrome. Anna had asked Sara, along with six others, to be her bridesmaid.

So as we were helping her put the dress on, Sara questioned her ability to wear a long gown that tied around her waist. She went from not being able to wear the sash tied to not wearing the dress at all. No logical persuasion was working towards changing her mind. In fact, the anxiety increased and then the tears flowed. Sara could not wear the dress and - worst of all - she felt she had disappointed her big sister. This is where the years of growing family love paid off.

Anna came into the room, with the photographer sighing at the interruption and frustrated with the backlog of photos she still needed to take. Anna put her hands on Sara's shoulders while Sara was attempting to wipe the flowing tears away, and calmly, firmly, and lovingly told Sara, "It's a stupid dress Sara. That's all it is. All that matters is I love you and you love me. The dress does not matter at all. I love you very much. That's what matters. It is your decision if you want to wear it or not. It's your decision if you want to be in the wedding or not. What matters most is that we love each other." They hugged. Sara was calm and her tears had stopped. Mine, on the other hand, had not. They were tears of deep pride in my extended family. These sisters know of that indescribable gift of love a family has that has gone through the journey.



*Sara at her sister's wedding, wearing a dress unlike the other bridesmaids*

I have seen over my year as a Family Consultant for CAYSI a gift of love between our CAYSI children and their teachers, other professionals, parents *and* siblings. The love and commitment surpasses strategies and techniques for learning. It keeps us focused on what's ultimately important as we strive together in creating united and accepting relationships in an inclusive community for *all* of us. And in the end...that's all that matters.

For those of you interested in what decision Sara made, her dad brought a shorter dress – no sash - and she graciously wore it while walking down the aisle - smiles and all!

## **Social Skills Videos: A Gateway to Social Skills Success!**

Cyral Miller, Outreach Director, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: this article presents resources for teaching social skills to students with visual impairment*

*Keywords: blind, visually impaired, social skills*

Educational teams work very hard to support academic success for students with visual impairments. Rising standards have made educational programming more complex. It can be difficult to find time to address all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), even when VI professionals are keenly aware of their students' needs based on their ECC evaluations. So while it is generally accepted that social skill competence is critical to success as an adult, social skills can be overlooked when individualized educational plan (IEP) goals are written. Once a team identifies priority social skills goals, they still must develop appropriate activities for instruction within an instructional timeframe. Teachers and family members are in great need of models to help them integrate social skills lessons into their hectic days.

A contest sponsored by a sub-committee of the Texas Advisory Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments is one new venue for assistance. The Advisory Committee was established by the Texas Education Agency in 2005 to collect input from statewide stakeholders interested in quality educational opportunities for students with visual impairments. The Committee determined that increasing the availability of instruction in all areas of the ECC was a significant priority. Several subcommittees have focused on different ways to meet that goal. On the front page of the TSBVI website, there has been an invitation to submit short videos with examples of social skills lessons. This is the second year of this contest. Last year's winning videos (accessible at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/component/content/article/3642-cinema-winners>) included an evening event where students learned to play games with typical peers, a lesson on how to respond to bullying, demonstrations on how to dress and prepare for a special night out, an O&M lesson on how to politely request help, and a game that helped review effective communication skills. A lesson guide accompanies each 3-5 minute video. Thanks to collaboration with the Described Captioned Media Program (DCMP), the videos are also excellent examples of captioning and audio description, important features for accessible video instruction.

Social Skills is a term that encompasses an enormous set of skills, with overlap into independent living skills, communication, recreation and leisure, career education, transition and other areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum. For that reason, lessons in social skills can target a variety of skills in addition to a specific social skill. The Game Night video/lesson, for example, allows students to develop improved conversational skills, recreational skills and turn taking skills, and it would be possible to add in O&M practice, writing (game directions), assistive tech (switches or an iPad to keep track of scores) and many other ECC objectives.



As shown on the videos, one strategy for making time for social skills (or other areas of the ECC) is to infuse new and emerging skills across the day so that there are multiple opportunities to practice and generalize. Just as students will need to use social skills in many settings, it is important to work with the educational team, including the family, to highlight and practice skills where appropriate at school and at home, not just during a VI or O&M lesson.

At a recent session at the Texas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) conference, participants were asked to work in small groups to design activities in selected areas of social skill development. They were given 10 minutes. In that limited time each group planned at least one lesson, and some were able to draft a series of lessons. These ideas will be posted on the [TAER](#) and [TSBVI](#) websites.

Please share your great ideas with others! The winning videos from the Social Skills Cinema 2011 and 2012 contests are designed to provide a resource library for creative social skills instructional ideas and inspire innovative lessons for busy VI professionals and families.

Members of the social skills subcommittee are:

Virginia Haas, Administrative Supervisor of Low Incidence Populations, Austin Independent School District

Alaine Hinds, Parent and Community Organizer, Arc of Texas

Cyral Miller, Director of Outreach Programs, TSBVI

Rona Pogrud, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Special Education, Texas Tech University

Mary Ann Siller, M.Ed., Teacher of Students who are Blind or Have Low Vision

## **Resources for Teaching Social Skills to Students with Visual Impairments**

### **Books and Articles**

Gense, D.J. & Gense, M.H. (2005). *Autism spectrum disorders and visual impairment: Meeting students' learning needs*. New York: AFB Press.

Hagood, L. (2008). *Better together*. Austin, TX: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Hatlen, P. (2004). Is social isolation a predictable outcome of inclusive education? *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 98, 676-678.

Koenig, A.J. & Holbrook, M.C. (2000). *Foundations of Education (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.): Volume II Instructional Strategies for Teaching Children and Youths with Visual Impairments*. New York: AFB Press. (Chapter 17)

McIntyre,, T. (2003). Teaching social skills to kids who don't yet have them. Retrieved from [http://www.idonline.org/article/Teaching\\_Social\\_Skills\\_to\\_Kids\\_Who\\_Don't\\_Yet\\_Have\\_Them?theme=print](http://www.idonline.org/article/Teaching_Social_Skills_to_Kids_Who_Don't_Yet_Have_Them?theme=print)

Pogrund, R.L. & Fazzi, D.L. (Eds.) (2002). *Early focus: Working with young children who are blind or visually impaired and their families* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: AFB Press. (Chapter 6)

Pogrund, R. & Strauss, F. (1992) .Approaches to increasing assertive behavior and communication skills in blind and visually impaired persons. In S. Sacks, L. Kekelis,, & R. Gaylord-Ross (Eds.), *The development of social skills by blind and visually impaired students* (pp. 102-127). New York: AFB Press.

Sacks., S.Z., Leuck, A., Corn, A.L., & Erin, J.N. (2011) Supporting the social and emotional needs of students with low vision to promote academic and social success. Council for Exceptional Children: Division on Visual Impairment Position Paper. Retrieved from <http://www.cecdvi.org/positionpapers.html>

Sacks, S.Z. & Wolffe, K.E. (Eds.) (2006). *Teaching social skills to students with visual impairments: From theory to practice*. New York: AFB Press.

## **Social Skills Evaluation Tools**

(Those not commercially available are included In the handouts for the Texas AER 2012 Conference at <http://www.txaer.org/Conferences/conferences.htm>

*SSOCVI: Social Skills Observation Checklist for the Visually Impaired* (Pogrund & Strauss)

*SSAT-VI: Social Skills Assessment Tool for Children with Visual Impairments*

*Social Competence Assessment* (Sacks & Wolffe, pp. 299-301)

*Social Perception Observation Scale* (adapted from scale by Esther Minskoff)

*Social Skills Checklist* (Hatlen Center for the Blind)

Social Interaction Checklist in *Autism Spectrum Disorders and Visual Impairment*

*EVALS- Social Skills Section* – tied to the TEKS (TSBVI)

## **Tools and Ideas for Teaching Social Skills**

Exercises for Practicing Gestures (Pogrund)

Reaching-Out Exercises (Pogrund)

Exercises for Practicing Gestures (Pogrund)

Ice Breakers (Pogrund)

Aggressive and Nonassertive Behavior (Pogrund)

5 Videos on Social Skills: *Focused On Social Skills* (Sacks & Wolffe - AFB Press)

AFB Career Connect: <http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=2&SectionID=7>

NFB Link: <http://www.nfbblink.org/>

## Trying out “Every Move Counts, Clicks, Chats”

Sara Kitchen, VI Education Specialist, TSBVI Outreach

Jayme Wratchford, Education Specialist for Students with Visual Impairments, Region XIII ESC.

*Abstract: a team uses the assessment tool Every Move Counts, Clicks, Chats to evaluate a student with visual impairment and additional severe disabilities*

*Keywords: communication assessment, visually impaired, multiple disabilities.*

On May 31, 2011, I visited a team who was concerned about the symbol system that needed to be used to support communication for their young student. The student has cortical visual impairment (CVI) as well as motor and speech impairments. I had just been to see Jane Korsten present information concerning the updated Every Move Counts communication assessment, which is called Every Move Counts, Clicks, and Chats, or emc<sup>3</sup>. This assessment tool seemed to be targeting the kinds of questions this team was asking, and we decided to attempt to use it to guide instruction during the following school year.

Over the course of the 2011-2012 school year, the team has been using emc<sup>3</sup> to try to determine the correct symbol system for their student, who is a very subtle communicator. The team started by providing sensory stimuli to the student and determining his reactions using the Sensory Assessment provided in emc<sup>3</sup>. Modalities tested included gustatory, vestibular, proprioceptive, tactile, visual, auditory, and olfactory. The student demonstrated a strong positive response to auditory, vestibular, and proprioceptive inputs. The non-preferred sensory channels included gustatory and olfactory inputs. The student responded positively to tactile input consistently but the response was not as strong. The student responded weakly to visual stimuli. The team also determined through the Communication Assessment, which compiled data from observations of all of the team members, that the student communicated mainly through affect, vocalization, and movement, and that communication was perlocutionary, or pre-intentional. Activities were built around the sensory inputs that created the strongest positive response in the student. The team also considered activities that would reinforce the student’s communicative attempts, helping him understand that his behavior would affect others in consistent ways. They also created a special environment, or den, in which the student could independently interact with objects, which addressed fine and gross motor IEP objectives. They considered tenants of Lilli Nielsen’s Active Learning when creating the den.

Activities designed from emc<sup>3</sup> assessment findings thus far were start-stop, or continuation activities. The pleasant stimulus would be presented and then stopped, and the student signaled for more by smiling, making a sound, or moving his body. The team began to introduce an object that the student would have physical access to throughout the activity in order to build associations between the object and the activity. Team members then refined their vocalizations to make them consistent and simple in order to build auditory associations. Since the lesson consisted of activities in which materials and actions were consistent, the amount of conversation between teachers and therapists

was reduced. This made it easier for the child to discriminate auditory input and also made it easier for educators to focus on the child, not the procedure. Their lesson became streamlined and the child began to show anticipation of the activities. IEP objectives were infused into all of the routines.

The next step was to determine which kind of cue or symbol system to which the student would respond most consistently. The team began to present only one type of symbol to see if the student anticipated the activity by performing the action that he normally does to signal for more. The symbol systems chosen were real objects, auditory input (presenting words or sounds exactly as they are vocalized within the routines), and a picture of the real object with visual clutter eliminated (taken on a black background) to see if he responded to a two-dimensional representation of a meaningful part of the routine. The team found it necessary to modify the symbol assessment, testing whether the student would anticipate the activity from the cue at the beginning of the activity, but not to signal for continuation. Since this has been the practiced routine, he may have been responding to the context of the routine and not the cue.

The team found that this assessment process has been lengthy. Access to the student was limited, as he was homebound and seen three times per week by educational staff. Health issues also limited access to him at times, as certain medications or interrupted sleep patterns caused him to be unable to participate fully on a given day.

One fantastic outcome that the team shared with me as a result of this process thus far is that the student is now much happier during his lesson than the previous year, during which he often cried. Look for a follow-up article in a future TX SenseAbilities issue to see how things are going for this student and team!

# Optimizing Vision

Chrissy Cowan, Mentor Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach

*Abstract: helpful information to maximize vision while reading or writing*

*Keywords: low vision, visual efficiency, study skills*

The student with low vision who is functioning in a general education classroom setting may be experiencing a multitude of visual challenges unique to the environments in which (s)he works. As a TVI, I need to have a construct in my head in order to quickly organize my observations of each environment, so that I can make adjustments and/or recommendations for accommodations.

For starters, I must consider the **lights** or brightness in the room. There are certain eye conditions that make lighting either detrimental (ocular albinism) or vital (optic nerve hypoplasia). Questions I might ask myself are: What is the lighting source? Is the student getting so close that their head obscures the light? Would a task light help? Where should the light be directed? If an outlet is nearby, the APH lamp is wonderful. Another option is a battery powered OTT® light that can be moved from room to room. When positioning the light, make sure the student's head or hand does not occlude the light, and that the light is not shining on the student's face. When the target surface is lighted or bright (Smart Board, overhead projector screen), students with lighting issues may have difficulties. The classroom lighting can be adjusted to accommodate, or in extreme cases, the student may need to have a desk (print) copy if significant copy work is required.

Next, I look at the student's **posture**. Many students have difficulties accessing their lower field, and placing material on a slant board positions the material up so that the student isn't slumped over his work. Since most students need to be able to read and write, I find a slant board that accommodates writing works better than a reading stand. See examples at <http://www.therapro.com/Better-Board-Slant-Boards-P28013C4192.aspx>. Or, use a 3 inch 3-ring binder turned sideways.

How **organized** is your student? It takes the student with low vision longer to find things. Students need to access their materials quickly, so storing for quick retrieval is necessary. Consider a small, stick-on battery operated closet light that you press for inside desks and other darker spaces. Backpacks will need folders and other organizational containers to keep papers organized, and smaller objects in desks should have dedicated containers. The TVI will need to check and reinforce that an established system is used consistently.

How is your student **writing** things down? You might need to provide adapted paper and writing tools, and adjust lighting and positioning of materials (see writing slant board above) if needed. Examples of writing tools include drafting pencils (or #1 soft lead, available in art/craft stores) and fine point felt tip pens. Students may perform better with bold line paper, or commercially available wide

ruled notebook paper with darker lines (compare these at the grocery store—some are darker than others). Writing may be so laborious that using a keyboard may be faster and more efficient.

Where are the **optical devices**? Assuming the student has been seen by a low vision specialist, start by making sure the prescribed optical devices are on hand and the student has learned how to use them correctly. Devices that tend to be handed to students by well-intentioned people should be avoided, such as a full page magnifier. Electronic near devices are best used for “spot” viewing, and will slow the student down when reading longer passages. If a closed circuit TV (CCTV or video magnifier) is in the room, find out if it is being used consistently. If it is not (perhaps due to portability, placement, too much enlargement) consider retraining student on a handheld or stand magnifier.

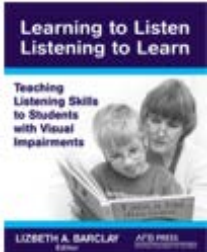
This construct should be used in every classroom setting which the student accesses at the beginning of the school year. Ultimately, you will be teaching the student how to monitor his own visual functioning in relation to the categories mentioned above, and be able to either adjust his body or inform his teachers about his visual preferences.

# Learning to Listen Listening to Learning: A Review

Patrick Van Geem

*Abstract: A review of the book of the same title, about teaching listening skills*

*Keywords: listening skills, visual impairments, multiple disabilities*



*Learning to Listen Book Cover*

The American Foundation for the Blind recently published a book on teaching listening skills to students with visual impairments. The book was compiled and edited by Liz Barclay, M.A. Coordinator of the Assessment Program at the California School for the Blind. There were several contributing writers to the book coming from various professions such as teachers for the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialists, speech pathologists, university professors and an educational diagnostician.

The book is divided into two parts, The Development of Listening Skills, and Unique Needs. Part 1 explains the importance of teaching listening skills. Chapters are organized according to development from infants to early childhood to high school. There is also a chapter on listening skills for orientation and mobility. Part 2 covers the students with unique needs. Some of the topics covered are students with additional disabilities, hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and English language learners.

A small committee was formed at the TSBVI Outreach Programs to study the book. We believe this book could greatly benefit teachers for the visually impaired, classroom teachers and orientation and mobility specialists, especially in the development of activities and strategies when teaching students listening skills. The committee developed a list of favorite (and not so favorite) chapters, sidebars and tables which we would like to share with you.

## **Chapter 1 The Importance of Listening Instruction**

“I like the first chapter the best. I like how it summarizes (in depth) the whole book.”

## **Chapter 2 Infants and Toddlers: Learning to listen**

- Table 2.2 “Communicative Functions during Infancy” pp.44-46
- Table 2.8 “Guidelines for Encouraging Touch and Hand Use” p. 59

## **Chapter 3 Preschool and Kindergarten: Early Skill Development**

- List of emerging listening skills (p. 67)
- Section on concept development (pp. 77-80)

- Sections on “Transition to School” and school related issues (p. 83 to the end of the chapter)
- Sidebars 3.1, pp. 70-72, listening activities and strategies at home and, listening skills and literacy 3.8, 3.9, 3.10
- First-hand accounts from visually impaired students and adults.

#### **Chapter 4 Elementary School: Developing and Refining Listening Skills**

- Foundation experiences students must have in order to comprehend the literature read to them (pp. 106-107)
- Opportunities for listening that are linked to literacy (pp. 112-113)
- Sidebar 4.3: prompting active listening (pp. 119-120)
- Sidebar 4.4: critical listening skills during oral classroom instruction (p. 122)
- Sidebar 4.5: recalling facts and details (p. 124)
- Listening for obtaining information (pp. 125-140)
- Sidebar 4.1: listening in relation to technology use (p. 128)
- Sidebar 4.9: audio-assisted reading (pp. 138-140)
- Listening and social skills (p.142)
- Lessons on listening and social skills (pp. 145-147)

There were some cautions on Chapter 4.

- Quite a few of the teaching suggestions would work well with VI resource classroom, but would be difficult with an itinerant model.
- The definition and activities for “active listening” may be difficult to be carried out by itinerant TVI’s (pp. 114-118)

Although these strategies are aimed at classroom teachers, itinerant teachers can share this information with general education teachers during consultation sessions. Many of these active listening suggestions would be helpful for all students, especially those with attention problems.

#### **Chapter 5 Middle School and High School: Advanced Skill Development**

- Essential skills needed before leaving high school (pp.154-155)
- Table 5.1: evolution of listening skills from K-12 (p. 156)
- Sidebar 5.1: taking lecture notes (p. 168)
- Table 5.3: resources on online sources and formats of e-books (p. 177-178)
- Strategies to begin practice skills necessary to effectively employ a live reader (p. 186)

#### **Chapter 7 Students with Additional Disabilities: Learning to Listen**

- Sidebar 7.1: Strategies for working with students with challenging behavior (p. 254)
- Sidebar 7.2: Levels of Prompting
- Bullets under “Individual and Learning Characteristics and Sensory Responsiveness” (p. 272)
- Sidebar 7.3: Modifications for creating a quiet classroom environment
- Bullets under “Adult as Models of Listening Behavior and Communication Partners (p. 280)

In Chapter 7 special mention was made of this section. The “Strategies to Target Listening Skills” is divided by developmental stages in auditory skills. Auditory skills are listed along with the strategies to teach:



- Becoming Aware of Sound:
  - Skills are on bulleted lists (p. 286)
  - Strategies described in sidebar 7.4 (p. 288)
- Sound Movement and Discovery:
  - Skills listed (p. 289)
  - Strategies under Using Predictable Spaces (p. 290 and p.291)
  - Strategies under Supported Environment, Sidebar 7.5 (p. 295)
- Understanding Auditory Information:
  - Skills Listed (p. 296)
  - Strategies-Conversational Interaction (pp. 297-8)
  - Strategies-Calendar System (pp299-301)
- Auditory Comprehension and Spoken Language:
  - Skills Listed (p. 303)
  - Strategies-Using Natural Routines (p. 310)

The “Listening Skills for Recreation/Leisure” is divided into two sections. Skills to teach and strategies to teach them are listed as:

- Independent Listening
  - Bullets on skills targeted (pp. 314-315)
  - Sidebar 7.6-Strategies for Targeted Listening Skills Using Recorded Stories and Music (p. 316)
- Group Recreational Listening (Music and Turn Taking)
  - Skills (p. 318-320)
  - Sidebar 7.7-Strategies for Teaching

Learning to Listen/Listening to Learn is available from the American Foundation for the Blind at [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org).

## What Is Happening in the VI and O&M Digital World?

Patrick Van Geem, TVI, AT Consultant TSBVI Outreach Department

*Keywords: VI blogs, braille production groups, distance learning  
TSBVI Blogs*

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website on the main page now contains a new link called “Blogs”. In this section are contained four separate blogs, Outreach VI Team, Outreach Assistive Technology, Texas Deafblind Project and Orientation and Mobility in Texas. Originally these blogs were developed for professionals in the Outreach Programs to share information with their respective colleague throughout the state of Texas, but is now open to anyone who cares to share their thoughts, websites, or research. Just send your entry as an email to: Sharon Nichols, nicholss@tsbvi.edu.

### **Distance Learning Website-Mike Bicknell (Media Specialist)**

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) Outreach Programs launched a new Distance Learning website in Spring 2011 to help organize our school’s distance training and distance collaboration tools and offerings in one, easy to use location. Training includes online courses, short video tutorials, and videoconference lectures, primarily using the Texas Education Telecommunications Network, or TETN. Collaboration includes meeting online via web meeting software, such as Adobe Connect, coming together using videoconference technology (Tandberg, Polycom, Life Size, etc.) and video chat, such as Skype. We can also connect on TEA’s Project Share.

If you select the “Distance Learning Portal” link located on the TSBVI Distance Learning homepage, it will take you to the web page where most of the information contained in the site is located. It is divided into three sections: Distance Collaboration, Distance Training and Project Share. Selecting the Distance Training link will open a web page containing links to online courses, tutorials and video conferences. The tutorials section has links to various YouTube videos in the areas of adaptive PE, assistive technology, math (Susan Osterhaus), media, and Orientation and Mobility.

Please visit us @ [distance.tsbvi.edu](http://distance.tsbvi.edu). You can also reach the website by selecting the “Distance Learning” link on the home page of the TSBVI website ([www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)).

### **Braille Production Group-Patrick Van Geem, TVI (AT Consultant) and Sue Mattson, Certified Braille Transcriber**

After doing several workshops on braille production and tactile graphics, we found that similar

challenges and concerns in braille or tactile graphics production occurred whether it is in Tyler or El Paso. With this in mind, Sue and I decided to develop a networking group on a website hosted by a third-party company called Member Hub. It was created in an attempt to connect braillists and TVIs with each other in order to promote a collaborative networking group. It is in a testing phase now. We feel that braille production specialists are better serviced if they could network and offer support with each other.

The tools offered in the group are file sharing, discussion board, announcements, a collaboration tool (Whiteboard), a calendar of events, and a photo-sharing portal. It is a for-members-only group because it requires logging in, however if you want to join the group just send an email to; vangeemp@tsbvi.edu.

### **Traveling VI Blog, Liz Eagan Satter, TVI (Blog Administrator)**

[www.Travelingvi.com](http://www.Travelingvi.com)

Liz, a teacher for the visually impaired from Washington state, (formerly a TVI from Houston ISD) has developed a blog called "Traveling VI". The blog contains good information on the iPad and visual impairments. She is a wealth of information particularly in the area of assistive technology.

### **Tech Vision Blog, Denise M. Robinson, TVI, Ph.D. (Blog Administrator)**

<http://blindgeteducated.blogspot.com/>

Dr. Robinson's blog contains an enormous sources of information related to assistive technology and visual impairment. She has maintained this blog since 2010. Some of the information on the blog pertains to adults but the site is well worth the research.

### **Live Binder, Brenda Lee, TVI, Education Specialist, ESC-14**

<http://tinyurl.com/6w7np6n>

Brenda has developed a Live Binder website. Live Binder is a website portal containing bookmarks of favorite web addressed that the author finds interesting and is willing to share with colleagues and/or friends. Brenda's portal page contains nine categories: adaptive books, assistive technology, eyeball, iPad/iPod information, Region 14 TVI News, tactual books, teaching visually impaired students, using switches in the classroom, and virtual eye dissection. She has offered a wonderful source of information on websites not only on assistive technology but VI issues as well.

## Performance and Belonging: The Value of Team, Cast or Ensemble

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

*Abstract: The benefits of sports and other extra-curricular activities in the lives of students with visual impairment.*

*Keywords: teams, sports, recreation, competition, blind, visually impaired*

Extracurricular activities, be they in sports or the arts, are an important part of the school experience for all students who choose to participate. These activities help shape self-confidence and build skills such as focus, discipline and teamwork that have positive life-long implications. It is often reported that students with visual impairments lack opportunities to be on a school team or to be a part of a band or theatrical performance. But it is also true that most students, disabled and non-disabled, are not on the football team or orchestra or in the school play.

At the juncture of interest and ability, many young people may feel they don't have enough of either to commit themselves to the risk of putting themselves "out there" to be selected or rejected by the activity sponsors and perhaps even their peers. At the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, students are strongly encouraged to participate in one or more of our extracurricular activities. Among these are theater, music performance, track, wrestling, cheerleading, swimming and goal ball. Participation levels are high in part because our students know that for every ounce of effort they put out, our coaches and directors will return at least the same amount of encouragement and constructive feedback on performance.

Even at TSBVI, not everyone makes the team, and I think that is a good thing. As a six-foot tall seventh grader I had good success as a Little League pitcher, probably because, at my height, I was halfway to home plate before I released the ball. Admittedly, I showed up at the ballpark mostly for the social aspects and the snow cones at the concession stand. Years later, a half-hearted tryout at my high school did not get me on the team. I remember clearly from that day that I was surrounded by the very best players, and they were all miles ahead of me in hitting and fielding. These were kids who probably played year-round and all were in much better physical condition than I was because they worked at it. It was a bit of a life lesson: gravitate towards the things you really like to do, and if you expect to be good at it, you'll have to put out the effort. I went on play enough adult softball to scratch the bat and glove itch, and to develop a high interest and very modest skill in the game of tennis. Extracurricular activities, at their best, develop life-long interests that round out our personalities and connect us with people. They keep us physically, mentally and artistically growing. We want this for our students.

A student at TSBVI who had a positive and somewhat transformational experience qualifying for a squad a couple of years ago, did not make it onto the team this year. There were only so many slots and the turnout had a lot of talent. I can only speculate about the impact of this on the student because I didn't ask. My ideal outcome would be that the self-confidence gained by making the team in the first place has stuck, even if a little tattered, and that the student now has the interest to pursue other opportunities. Research tells us that the teenage brain does not necessarily deal with life experiences in the rational way my ideal outcome would wish for. Probably it takes many successful and unsuccessful experiences over time to shape what we take forward into our adult lives. As the adults in charge of the opportunities our students with visual impairments have to perform and compete, it seems our charge is to help kids overcome whatever barriers they as individuals face, to instill a sense of joy about the activity, and then to let them choose what they will make of it.

Don't get me wrong, at TSBVI we like to win. A recent conference wrestling, cheerleading and musical performance gathering in Mississippi showcased incredible talent from six schools. TSBVI brought home its share of wins and near wins. In a couple of weeks the track team and some of our musicians will head to New Mexico to compete and to perform. Our efforts and expectations, both from staff and from students, is that we cross back over the state line with medals aplenty. In May, the spring play (Willy Wonka) will have moments of sheer magic, perhaps from some unexpected places. Perhaps a strong performance and the positive feedback that will ensue will spark an interest in community theatre as an adult. Today several TSBVI students will run in the Capitol 10K race, and it may be the first time many runners and by-standers will have seen a blind person run in a race. Whenever and wherever students with visual impairments participate in these types of activities, old stereotypes begin to fall and new perspectives emerge about the skills, abilities and right to belong to whatever the larger community has to offer.

Programs such as the highly successful Sports Extravaganza, a regional event organized in the Dallas-Fort Worth area years ago, now draws kids from all across Texas and even out-of-state. All participants are welcomed. The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) recruits and trains a more elite group of young adults who go on to compete around the world in various sports. Even the United States Tennis Association (USTA) is actively promoting tennis for blind and visually impaired youth, recently donating quite a lot of equipment to TSBVI. The barriers to participation are falling, but not all opportunities are available to all kids in all places. Life-long fitness, the willingness to put oneself out there and the skills of teamwork are all highly correlated with employment, community involvement and the quality of one's social life. We should all be encouraged to spread these opportunities for all of our kids to win and to not win in a supportive environment that values effort in equal measure to ability.

## Deafblind Services in Texas

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

*Abstract: This article describes Deafblind services provided by the Division for Blind Services*

*Key Words: DBS, deafblind, deafblind apartments*

It is sometimes said that blindness separates you from things, while deafness separates you from people. Imagine some of the challenges faced by individuals who are experiencing not only vision loss, but also hearing loss. Fortunately, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Division for Blind Services (DBS) offers several in-house specialty supports, one of them being our Deafblind Services program. Deafblindness encompasses a variety of sensory issues and affects people of all ages and from all walks of life. This is why deafblind services are available for consumers served by all programs within DBS: Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (BCVDDP), Transition, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Independent Living (IL). To explain more about this invaluable program, I'm going to turn to the staff of the Deafblind Services team to share their insight.

There are four Deafblind Specialists who provide services for people with deafblindness in Texas. Because we support consumers served by all programs within DBS we wear many hats; for example, a typical work day might be comprised of a classroom visit, followed by a consultation with someone struggling to communicate on the job, and finally a home visit with a widow experiencing age-related vision and hearing loss! The overall result of this comprehensive approach is a highly specialized unit staffed by individuals attuned to the unique needs of those with deafblindness.

What do people think of when they hear the term "deafblind?" Helen Keller usually comes to mind, as someone who was totally without sight and without hearing. This is frequently not the case with deafblindness. Most of the consumers we serve have some vision and hearing. Deafblindness is generally comprised of two groups: the "hearing" deafblind and the "deaf" deafblind. The major difference between the consumers we serve is how they communicate.

Communication is the biggest challenge for individuals with dual sensory loss. Think about a married couple who have enjoyed each other's company for a lifetime, only to be cut off from one another by hearing loss. Or consider a bank teller who is perceived as aloof and snobby because he "ignores" his coworkers when they try to talk to him. What about a child who needs sign language support in her rural community? These are real examples of the breakdowns in communication our consumers face on a daily basis.

Many times our consumers are relieved to talk with someone from our unit who can help them articulate their experiences because it is difficult for friends, family, and employers to relate to

deafblindness. Deafblind Specialists may offer strategies for addressing issues with others and seek out local resources for support. Equipment and technology can make all the difference to someone with deafblindness. Hearing aids and assistive listening devices can bring the world back to someone who used speech (lip) reading prior to becoming blind.

Some of the simplest things to those of us with good vision and hearing are major hassles for people with deafblindness. For example, waking up for work can be a real problem if you cannot hear your alarm clock! There are a variety of personal alert devices available to help people be more in touch with their environment and promote safety and awareness. Deafblind Specialists work with consumers to locate items best suited to their individual hearing and vision situation.

Another program offered by DARS DBS is the Deafblind Apartment Program in Austin. This program is intended for working adults with deafblindness who need some supports in place to be independent. Consumers receive assistance with budgeting, shopping, arranging transportation, and communication systems for employment and independent living. The Deafblind Apartments provide consumers with opportunities to connect with the community via a monthly “coffee chat” social, as well as other activities to cultivate the friendships and networks we all need to be successful. This program is a wonderful example of how committed DBS staff are in promoting independence and quality of life for our consumers.

By partnering with other entities serving individuals with deafblindness, such as the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), and the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), to name a few, we can help families and individuals connect with local resources and get the training and support they need to be independent and more fulfilled. DARS DBS is also very grateful for our relationships with the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), Texas Chargers, the Deafblind Service Center of Austin (DBSC), the Texas Deafblind Association (TXDBA) and other organizations whose work has resulted in improved services for people who are deafblind.

For more information on Deafblind Services, please contact Rachel Simpson at:

512-377-0566 (voice)

512-410-1524 (VP)

or by email at: [Rachel.Simpson@dars.state.tx.us](mailto:Rachel.Simpson@dars.state.tx.us)

## All Blind Children of Texas

Gloria Bennett, Coordinator of ABCTX

*Abstract: In this article, Gloria Bennett, describes the All Blind Children of Texas' program that funds and supports the Expanded Core Curriculum.*

*Key Words: Blind, visually impaired, All Blind Children of Texas, Expanded Core Curriculum*

All Blind Children of Texas (ABCTX) is a nonprofit organization with a mission that all blind children in Texas will have a quality life, rich with opportunities that will maximize their potential. ABCTX, established in 2004, solicits donated funds to support programs that Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Certified O&M Specialists and ESC VI personnel would like to provide for blind and visually impaired students that support the Expanded Core Curriculum. The board of ABCTX is aware of the dedication and knowledge that Texas VI professionals have in relation to their students. We want you to be able to create opportunities for your students to experience events and activities that will deepen their knowledge of the world and enhance their lives, without having to pay out of your pocket. We have funded cooking programs, travel, camping and camps, arts and crafts, and a wide variety of recreation and sports activities. ABCTX provides funds to help families travel to Dallas to cheer for their children at Sports Extravaganza. The organization has awarded seven college scholarships through the sale of Virginia Bishop calendars and cards and one scholarship in collaboration with The Braille Revival League of Texas. The board encourages programs that include sighted peers and families.

Our application identifies these categories. Your program can address one or more of them.

- Social and recreational activities
- Fine arts activities
- Summer enrichment
- Youth camp or class scholarship
- Parent education and support
- Assistive technology or low vision devices (not covered by DARS or some other agency)
- Tutoring and mentoring

We ask in return that the request be based on need and that there is no other available source for the funding; that a record is kept of expenses and unspent amounts are returned; that an after-program report is sent within 2 weeks of the program; and that requests are kept to the exact amount needed so that we can fund as many projects for as many students as possible.

The mission of All Blind Children of Texas is to be a resource for the optimal physical, mental, emotional, and social development of all blind children of Texas. We know that is your mission as well! You can find the program application on our website at [www.abctx.org](http://www.abctx.org) where you can download, fill out and email it. If you have any questions, call Gloria Bennett at (512) 206-9234.



## 2012 Version of the IDEA Manual

Excerpt from: [www.thearcoftexas.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ARC\\_Idea](http://www.thearcoftexas.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ARC_Idea)

*Key words: TEA, Special Education, Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA)*

The newest version of the IDEA Manual is now available. This booklet is a great resource for families trying to understand the Texas special education system. The manual is available in English and Spanish.

The manual covers both Federal and state laws including, the reauthorized 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), current Federal regulations and state laws current through the 2011 legislative session.

The goal of the manual is to ensure that parents have a good understanding of the requirements of IDEA. Parents are encouraged to use the information they have learned from this manual and to work in partnership with the school staff to develop and plan an educational program that will lead to an independent and productive life for their child.

## AIM Navigator

Cyral Miller, TSBVI Outreach Director

*Abstract: This article describes a web-based tool that can assist with making decisions about accessible instructional materials for students*

*Key Words: News & Views, blind, visually impaired, assistive technology, IEP*

The AIM Navigator is an accessible, web-based tool designed to help local educational teams think through decisions about accessible instructional materials for students. It has sections to address assessing student need, determining appropriate instructional formats, decisions on purchase/acquisition of appropriate formats, and related training/supports to support student progress. There are many helpful sections with in depth information available to help with each step in the process, and the Navigator generates a student summary that can follow a student across their years of schooling as well as a To Do list documenting next steps for the team. This FREE tool is found on the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials website at [http://aim.cast.org/experience/decision-making\\_tools/aim\\_navigator](http://aim.cast.org/experience/decision-making_tools/aim_navigator).

# Eyewear for Children with Down Syndrome

Excerpt from: [www.specs2us.com](http://www.specs2us.com)

*Key words: Glasses, Down syndrome*

SPECS4US is a company that specializes in frames for children and adults with Down syndrome. It was started in 2004 by Maria Dellapina who has worked in the optical industry for over 25 years and is a mother of a child with Down syndrome.

“Erin’s World” is a line of frames that is specially designed to fit children with Down syndrome. The glasses are designed to stay in place, reducing slipping and the bridge is made to fit on a smaller nose. These frames are available in a variety of sizes and styles.

## Links to Braille Sites

*Abstract: Links to organizations that promote Braille*

*Key words: braille, braille literacy, blind, visually impaired, AFB, Braille Bug, Braille Challenge, Seedling Books, Hadley School for the Blind*

Below you will find web sites of organizations that are dedicated to promoting braille.

### Braille Bug

Excerpt from [www.afb.org/braillebug/](http://www.afb.org/braillebug/)

This web site was designed by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) to educate sighted children, grades 3rd through 6th, about braille. It has informative sections on braille, a reading club, games & secret messages, and biographies and information on Louis Braille and Helen Keller.

### Braille Institute Braille Challenge Reading, Writing and Spelling Contest

Excerpt from [www.brailleinstitute.org/Services/The\\_Braille\\_Challenge.aspx](http://www.brailleinstitute.org/Services/The_Braille_Challenge.aspx)

The Braille Challenge is an academic competition for students in the 1st to 12th grade. This contest is designed to motivate and reward students for their study of braille.

Preliminary Challenges are held regionally in the state or a Teacher of the Visually Impaired can administer it to an individual student. The top 60 students from the United States and Canada will be invited to attend and compete in the National Braille Challenge Finals in Los Angeles, California on June 22 -23, 2012.

The contest categories include: Braille Speed and Accuracy, Braille Spelling, Charts and Graph Reading, Proofreading and Reading Comprehension.

## **Seedling Braille Books**

Excerpt from [www.seedlings.org](http://www.seedlings.org)

Seedlings Braille Books for Children is a 501(c) 3 non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality, low cost braille books for children.

Seedling has a special project called the Angel Program. Thanks to their generous donors, Seedling is offering two braille books a year to children who are blind and visually impaired. You can register your child on their web site.

## **“Braille Signs is Cool to Do”**

Excerpt from <http://www.hadley.edu/braillesong>

The Hadley School for the Blind is excited to announce the debut of a song about braille called "Braille Signs Is Cool To Do." Hadley instructor, Linn Sorge and friend and former ambassador to the school, Becky Williams, wrote the lyrics to the song. Musicians Anne Hills, David Roth and Chip Kramer recorded the song and brought it to life.

To learn more about the story of this special song and to listen to it, please visit: <http://www.hadley.edu/braillesong>

**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](mailto:kcd@tsbvi.edu).

# Bulletin Board

## Announcements/Regional, State, 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](mailto: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).



### National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

NFADB 2012 Symposium  
July 13-15, 2012  
“Preparing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow: Leadership in the 21st Century”  
Location: Austin, Texas

Everyone will learn new skills, receive invaluable resources, meet families from around the country and return home with new ideas to help them, their child and their community.

Parent Leaders are encouraged to apply



### Paths to Literacy

for students who are blind or visually impaired

Paths to Literacy is website which is a joint project between Perkins School for the Blind and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). It is an effort hope to assist educators and families in the quest to provide literacy experiences for children who are blind or visually impaired. The site contains information ranging from from an overview of literacy to an exploration of different media (print, braille, auditory strategies). Paths to Literacy is an interactive site which encourages users to add ideas and ask questions. Please take some time to visit Paths to Literacy.



**TX AT Conference**  
*June 12-14, 2012*

**Texas Assistive Technology Network Regional Conference**  
**June 12 - 14, 2012**

**Region 4 Education Service Center**

7145 West Tidwell  
Houston, Texas 77092

Come to Houston to learn from national and local presenters and experience what assistive technology can offer you, your staff and district regarding accommodations, process and consideration, technical expertise and training. Come see, touch and learn about assistive technology interventions which could increase your students' success.

Contact: Kirk Behnke  
(713) 744-6559  
kbehnke@esc4.net

**Statewide Conference on Education of the Deaf: Achieving Student Success in a Digital World**  
**July 30-August 1, 2012**

Westin Galleria Houston, 5060 West Alabama Houston, TX 77056

Online registration at: [www.swced.org](http://www.swced.org)

Professionals and Paraprofessionals: \$190 - \$225 after June 1, 2012

Family Members and University Students: \$30 - \$40 after June 1, 2012

High School Students: Free

Training Strands: Parent/Infant Education, Preschool, Signed Communication/Interpreting, Listening & Spoken Language/Evaluation, English/Language Arts, Low Functioning Deaf/Transition, Deaf Studies/Culture, Administrative & Legal Issues, Technology, Accessing General Curriculum (math, science, social studies), Family Involvement

## Upcoming Trainings and Events

### Save the dates!

#### **LID Academy 2012 – Active Learning Conference**

June 19-20, 2012

Presenter: Patricia L. Obrzut

This professional development will provide strategies and resources for teachers and others who serve students with low incidence disabilities (severely cognitively disabled, multiply impaired). The presentation will include an introduction to the concepts of active learning. Register at:

<http://events.ednet10.net/FE2Production.nsf/eventdetails?readform&eventid=EVT-EVES-8GSLNF>

Location: Region 10 Education Service Center, Richardson, TX

#### **Intervener Team Training Model**

September 21-22, 2012

This is a training for new interveners their classroom teacher(s) and team members. This event provides information about the roles and responsibilities of the intervener, how the intervener functions within the educational team and an overview to working with students who are deafblind. More information will be available soon! (check at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/1013-statewide-staff-development-calendar-for-professionals-in-visual-impairment->) Location: TSBVI, Austin, TX

More information will be available soon! (check at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/1013-statewide-staff-development-calendar-for-professionals-in-visual-impairment->) Location: TSBVI, Austin, TX

#### **Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT) Annual Family Conference**

October 12-14, 2012

Visit [www.dbmat-tx.org](http://www.dbmat-tx.org) for more information.

Location: Camp John Marc, Meridian Texas

#### **Southwest Orientation and Mobility Association (SWOMA) Annual Conference**

November 1-3, 2012

More information will be available soon!

Location: Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Austin, TX

#### **Texas Chargers Annual Conference**

November 2-4, 2012

Visit [www.txchargers.org](http://www.txchargers.org) for more information.

Location: Camp Allen, Navasota Texas

#### **Sowell Center Lecture Series**

Seeing Eye, Inc

November 17, 2012

A Lecture on complex intersections will be featured. More information will be available. Go to <http://cms.educ.ttu.edu/research/sowell/default/> for more information.

Location: Virginia Murray Sowell Center, Texas Tech University Lubbock, TX

## TX SenseAbilities

**Published quarterly: February, May, August, and November**

Available in Spanish and English on TSBVI's website at <[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)>.

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

Items to be considered for publication should be submitted by email to the section editors at the addresses listed below, or mailed to:

TSBVI Outreach  
1100 West 45th Street  
Austin, Texas 78756

Deadlines for Submitting Articles  
December 1st for the Winter edition  
March 1st for the Spring edition  
June 1st for the Summer edition  
September 1st for the Fall edition

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The audio version of *TX SenseAbilities* is provided by Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Austin, TX



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