



# SenseAbilities

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

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On Friday, June 26, 2009, five young adults with deafblindness visited President Barack Obama in the Oval Office in honor of Helen Keller Deafblind Awareness Week. Read “Still Thriving and Excelling Long After Helen Keller” in News & Views on page 34.

## A Different Road: Up and down escalators with a daughter with special needs

By Sarah Barnes, Parent, Austin, TX  
Published with permission from author.

*Abstract: A parent describes her reactions when seeing her daughter with a visual impairment and additional disabilities independently ride the escalator. She reflects on the upcoming changes for her daughter as she moves from elementary to middle school.*

*Key words: Blind, visual impairment, children, orientation & mobility, special education, self-confidence, independence, growing-up, letting go*

I'm on the upper level of Highland Mall hiding between Children's Place, a clothing store, and Radio Shack. It's a weekday morning with few shoppers, so it's a perfect time to spy on my daughter Meredith. As a fifth-grader with a visual impairment, she comes here once a week with her therapist, Marjie Wood, who is trained in orientation and mobility therapy [*Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist*] with the Austin Independent School District.

Marjie and Meredith have been together for a decade conquering obstacles that most of us don't even give a second thought. Meredith didn't walk until she was 5, and that was on even surfaces. It took another two years for her to traverse grass, potholes and wood chips, and she still sometimes needs help to get on and off curbs.

One of the reasons she sometimes stumbles is because her legs are uneven and compensating for the steel rod in her back sometimes throws her off balance. But it's her vision that might have the biggest impact on her mobility.

Meredith was born with the center part of her brain underdeveloped, and for reasons no one can really explain she cannot use her eyes together. She uses them one at a time, which is laborious, but it works for her. This makes things like stairs particularly challenging because without binocular vision, she loses much of her depth perception.

With all this going on, it's remarkable how Meredith finds the energy to start the day, but here she comes into the mall, undaunted. The first thing she does is look for the mall map. She's right below me, so I bend a little to hide behind a plant. Marjie glances up at my post and spots me. Game on.

Meredith makes a beeline for the escalator. This is why I am here, because Marjie says Meredith can now get on and off, but I'm skeptical. In fact, I avoid escalators when I'm alone with Meredith because I'm worried she'll lose her balance and send us both tumbling. It also takes Meredith a full two minutes of standing at the escalator to work up the nerve to get on, and then usually I end up lifting her on.



*The first thing fifth-grader Meredith Hemphill does when she arrives at Highland Mall is consult the mall map. She and her Orientation & Mobility Specialist come here once a week to work on real-life situations.*

And so today I watch and, hopefully, see for myself what Marjie has been telling me for weeks.

I'm guessing at any second Marjie will get in front of her and start giving her verbal cues to coax her on the escalator.

But my guess is wrong. Marjie stays behind her and with virtually no prompting, Meredith hops on the escalator without a nanosecond of hesitation.

Huh? My hands are over my mouth, and I'm whispering to no one in particular, "Oh My God."

Marjie and Meredith are about half way up when Marjie turns around to find me and our eyes meet. I throw my hands in the air, and Marjie flashes me a thumbs-up sign. Marjie and I have learned how to communicate about Meredith with virtually no words spoken between us. It's a true gift to have a therapist who loves your child as much as you do, but it's a greater gift to have a therapist who can read the mother's mind.

I continue to spy as Meredith gets off the escalator—an equal challenge—with absolutely no trouble. Then she runs over to the down escalator. Marjie follows, and the two begin to look like a game of cat and mouse as they go up and down, up and down.

I can't help but see the metaphor for my life here.

Meredith has become a different kid this year in fifth grade, her final year at Gullett Elementary School. In addition to her escalator surprise, she recently began tracing letters, meaning some day she might write her name. Her social life is beautifully hectic. She can now carry her own lunch tray, and she proudly sits with her friends in the lunchroom buzzing with conversation. Meredith's world, largely created by Principal Janie Ruiz and teacher Bonnie O'Reilly and a classroom of energizing fifth-graders, is



defined by a seamless culture of inclusion where kids with disabilities and kids without disabilities learn side by side.

But despite all these poignant leaps in physical and mental development, I was told in a recent school meeting that Meredith will be getting a new label next year: "Mentally retarded."

I was told I could think it over. The reasoning is that the label better fits her disabilities and that technically the definition is correct for Meredith based on her school testing. I tried to think about it logically on my drive home that day, but all I could think about was that other label — "retard" — and how that was going to feel if anyone ever used it to refer to my child. By the time I was at the corner of Koenig Lane and Burnet Road, the tears were racing down my cheeks. And that would be the down of my escalator.

It's not just that my baby is growing up; it's that so is everyone else. It's a mixed bag of grief and hope for a parent who has to reconcile the idea that while other kids are continuing to move ahead in academics, his or her own child has not kept pace and will never catch up.

Meredith learns differently, but I didn't know until I visited her middle school that vocational activities are pushed for special

education students as early as sixth grade. A child like Meredith, who has spent 60 percent of her day in a regular education classroom, will be excluded from nearly all these same classes in middle school.



She won't see her friends nearly as often either, because her friends' world will become one of advanced placement classes and extracurricular activities. There is no pity here, but in coming months I will have to explain to Meredith how different her day is going to look. To be fair, Meredith might not be in the classroom with her peers in regular education all day, but her curriculum is inventive and exciting, and under her special education teacher's skillful guidance, I know she will learn much.

And if I know my daughter, she will tackle this new experience with hundreds of questions for her teacher and an unapologetic enthusiasm for learning the names of all her fellow sixth-graders. I'm not sure what she'll do the second day.

Back at the mall, I continue to watch in amazement at Meredith's escalator prowess. I don't see a daughter with mental retardation. I see a daughter who at times can demonstrate the mental concentration of a tightrope walker. I see a daughter who is blessed with the curiosity of a scientist and the devil-may-care attitude of a fifth-grader. I see a girl who has won the attention of a classroom full of fifth-graders who go out of their way to help her on the playground. They invite her to birthday parties, and they are bummed out that she will not go to their magnet schools next fall.

I understand labels exist for reasons of testing and placements and other hard conclusions, but it's my hope this new label for Meredith will remain in the file cabinet.

*Editor's note: Sarah Barnes writes occasionally in the Austin American Statesman about the joys and challenges of raising a child with disabilities. You may reach her at <adifferentroad@aol.com>.*

## Out of the Mouths of Moms

By Jean Robinson, Visually Impaired Family Support, TSBVI Outreach

*Abstract: Mothers of children with visual impairments share their experiences teaching them to ride a bike.*

*Keywords: blind, visually impaired, children, bicycles, parent listserv, advice*

The Texas VI Family Listserv is a great way to connect to other families and to ask those questions that you may be afraid to ask or forget to ask when meeting with professionals. Many of the answers can only be found from experienced family members. Here are several answers given to a mom's

question about bicycle riding. If you have a child, grandchild, or other family member with a visual impairment living in Texas you are eligible to subscribe. Send your request to: <txvifamily-subscribe@topica.com> or <jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>.

Deborah Sims:

*I have a question regarding bicycle riding. Does anyone have a child with low vision or blind who rides a bike? My son is six and has low vision from Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). He is quite successful riding his scooter to and from school everyday and he goes really fast and loves it. He rides better than his twin brother!! Go figure.*

*He also has a learner bike called Glider (originally from Germany called Puky). It is a bike without pedals and has a platform for the feet to rest while the bike is rolling.*

*Anyway, he will ride it sometimes and he has a great time, but he will not put his feet on the platform unless we encourage him. He can do it, but I guess he is just not comfortable.*

*Does anyone out there have a success story to share in regards to riding a bicycle? Thanks a mill.*

#### **PARENT RESPONSES**

Sally Thomas:

*My son is mostly blind, a braille reader and he rides a bike. His athletic, fully sighted sister is the one who ran into a parked car! He began riding a bike (no training wheels) when he was about 6 1/2—never had a problem with it. He was encouraged to lose the training wheels when the other kids in the neighborhood his age were already riding without theirs. I feel comfortable with him riding in our neighborhood when he has someone riding with him. We plan to get a tandem bike for longer rides.*

*He has completely blind friends who also ride bikes. I'm not sure how they do it, but they do. I think it takes a lot of encouragement to get some kids comfortable with riding a bike. It may be more of a personality issue than a*

*blindness issue. I've seen sighted kids who took years to master a bike and kids like my son who were ready in a day. Just keep on trying and encouraging. That's my 2 cents.*

Kim Cunningham:

*My daughter is low vision from ROP also. Because she has a small amount of vision in one eye, she had a little harder time learning to ride her bike. I would notice that her center of gravity was off due to her trying to use her vision. I would hold on to the back of her shirt while practicing, and I noticed that she was always leaning to the side. I couldn't get her to keep the bike upright.*

*We began teaching her when she was five, but she didn't learn to ride until she was 10. Almost every weekend she would get on her bike and try to ride by herself. She never gave up.*

*Then one day her brother was visiting and he started working with her. She got on and took off! We were thrilled for her after all the years of trying.*

*Even now when she rides, she is not keeping the bike perpendicular to the sidewalk and tends to lean a little bit. I also see that her knee is pointing out on one side and not kept close to the bike like sighted kids do. But, she found her own way and it works for her.*

*My suggestion is to NOT give up and let your son find his own way that is comfortable and secure for himself. Keep the can-do attitude!*

Suzanna Mouton:

*My son was low vision when he was 6. He has since become totally blind, however he did learn to ride a bike when he was low vision and also a Braille reader and cane user. We worked and worked and worked with*

him, and he finally did it and it was such an accomplishment! The joy on his face!

He did quit once he totally lost his vision but his best friend bought a tandem bike and they used to ride it all through the neighborhood! The thing is, once you learn to ride a bike, you never forget and I believe my son could get on a bike at the age of 22 and still be able to ride. I agree, encouragement is the key!

Michele Chauvin:

I agree. Tricycles, training wheels, no training wheels, tandem bikes, etc. Lauren has not been interested in tricycles or bicycles, yet. We keep trying. She enjoys and learns well with the H-U-H (hand under hand) method with most things.

I think we may get a tandem bike or more likely an adult bike plus an arch extension - the kind for a smaller rider or child to fit on the back of the bike and peddle themselves. This might encourage Lauren to use a bicycle as a means to an end (getting from home to the park, etc.). She loves running, climbing, jumping, swimming, and even sliding down those giant pool slides at water parks.

I tend to agree with Sally that it may be more of a personality preference. Luke and I don't ride bikes, although we know how. We read books a lot and love music. So guess what Lauren likes to do? But we'll keep trying with the bicycle thing.

Here's a great website about movement and activities for blind and VI kids. Dan Kish spoke at a breakout session a few years ago during TX Focus. He is a blind COMS or O&M instructor, who takes blind kids mountain bike riding, etc. I love his ball in a plastic grocery bag idea to include blind/VI kids

with their sighted peers, as an alternative to goal ball, etc. Check it out!!!  
[www.worldaccessfortheblind.org](http://www.worldaccessfortheblind.org)

Bonnie:

I am also mom to a Daniel. Here is what happens with a 4 1/2 year old legally blind kid (about 20/360, worse in bright light) on his first 2 wheeler with training wheels. Here are the "before" pics, when I got the bike from Freecycle.

Here are the "after part 1" pictures—we made it much more sensory friendly. He loved the streamers on his tricycle, and said "big boys have squeaky bikes" meaning old ones that squeak. We found him an annoyingly squeaky horn instead, to go with the bell already on it, and the orange bike flag for added safety.

And the "after part 2" pictures—well, before and after.

When he saw it, we thought he would do his over excited "Happy Flappy" dance. Nope! He said "Thomas bike" as he ran up to it and got on and rode off—like "it's about darn time I had a Thomas bike"

Dad said he flipped it over 273 times (see handlebars and broken off horn—he even had bent the handlebars on fall #271 when he broke the horn, but Dad and Uncle Walter bent them back)

\*Not a scratch\* on Daniel! Dad's legs are torn up from trying to stop/lessen the falls. Daniel thought the falls were funny. Not surprised, this is the kid that was swinging on a platform swing like a madman at rehab this morning, he reached to point to something and flipped off and under the swing. As Mary (therapist) and I started to move in, he says calmly "Daniel looking bottom swing" Reminds me of the Pee Wee Herman line "I meant to do that."

*As he went to bed tonight Daniel said after school and rehab tomorrow he and Daddy were going to take another "Tall ride" (opposite of "short ride" is "tall ride") with his Thomas bike. Dad now agrees he needs a helmet but is still saying "no" to the elbow and knee pads*

*Another day like today may change his mind. Gonna be a long summer—is there a discount pass for the ER? I think we may be needing it. A lot.*

*Deborah Sims:*

*Thank you for your replies. I wasn't sure if it was too much for me to ask of him. It's so good to hear it's not impossible. We'll keep chugin' away!!*

**ONE DAY LATER**

*Deborah Sims:*

*Thank you all for your replies. It's really good to hear of success stories. I now have one to add to the mix here. The day I sent out an email to txvifamily looking for encouragement, I find out Daniel rode his bike (no training wheels) around the black top trail!!! Whoohoo!!!! I took my daughter to swim practice that evening and got back late. I didn't know it, but while we were gone, daddy and the boys went for a bike ride and guess what? ...long story short, the next morning, Daniel rode his bike to school!!!!!!! We are so proud of him. I couldn't believe my eyes!! He did it!!!*

## **Going To The Braille Challenge®**

By Ahbee Orton, Student, Crowley, TX

*Abstract: A Texas student describes her experience competing in a national Braille contest. Ahbee Orton wins first place for the grade 1-2 category.*

*Keywords: blind, visual impairment, Braille, literacy*

*Editor's Note: The Braille Challenge® is an academic competition sponsored by the Braille Institute. This two-stage contest is designed to motivate blind students to emphasize their study of braille, while rewarding their success with a fun-filled, but challenging, weekend of events. For information go to <[www.brailleinstitute.org/braille\\_challenge](http://www.brailleinstitute.org/braille_challenge)>.*

My name is Ahbee Orton and I am 9 years old. I will be in the third grade at Deer Creek Elementary in Crowley ISD.

My family went with me to the Braille challenge. These are my teachers that helped me get good at Braille: Michelle Garrett and Mary Elliott. My mobility teacher's name is Jill Brown.

The preliminary round was at my school. I did it with Mrs. Garrett. The (national) competition was held at the Braille Institute in Los Angeles California on Saturday, June 20. I had to do spelling, proofreading, and comprehension for my age group.

The winners would be announced that (night) at the special banquet. I was thinking maybe I would win. Then they said my name as the first place winner. I felt excited. I got a trophy, a thousand dollars savings bond, and a Pac Mate. A Pac Mate is a computer device for Braille readers.

I was nervous to be in front of all the



people that were there. Jim Cummings was there. He was the emcee. Jim Cummings is the voice of Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, and many other characters. Scott Macintyre was there also. He was the blind person on American Idol.

I liked going shopping with my dad. We went shopping the day of the Banquet. It was fun because I like shopping. We went shopping at the City Walk at Universal Studios.

I liked sleeping in a hotel. The hotel had a pool and a Jacuzzi. I liked swimming in the pool and the Jacuzzi. My family touched the Pacific Ocean with our feet. The water was cold.

My family went to Santa Monica and ate dinner at a restaurant called Bubba Gump Shrimp. They had all kinds of shrimp. I ate popcorn shrimp. It was good. Me and my sister, Elizabeth, danced at Bubba Gump Shrimp. The whole trip was fun.

## How to Help & Cope When Your Grandchild Has a Disability

By Julie Holmquist

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*Abstract: A family shares suggestions on how grandparents can support their children when they have a child with a disability.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, grandparents, parent support*

Tom and Gwen Besnett sound like any other set of proud grandparents. Ask them about their grandson, Orion, and they'll tell you that he is not only charming and gutsy; he has perfect pitch, loves reading car magazines, speaks Arabic with his neurosurgeon, and chats in Urdu and Hindi with a former personal care attendant.

But when Orion Besnett Slocum was born 20 years ago to their daughter, Lisa, it was a crisis for the couple. They discovered that Orion had Dandy-Walker syndrome and was legally blind. "Someone in the hospital told me that he wasn't going to live," Gwen recalls. "It didn't look like he was going to be able to talk," Tom says.

In the years following Orion's birth, Tom and Gwen discovered - by trial and error - how grandparents can best help their child

as well as their grandchild with a disability. Tom, Gwen, and Lisa share their advice.

Tom's advice:

- Join a group. "It provides a wonderful way for grandparents to maintain their bearings and share their sense of loss and grief with other understanding grandparents," Tom says. "It also provides a good place to celebrate the tiny gains in your grandchild's life."
- Find out who your grandchild is and find ways to enjoy him and to celebrate with him.
- Figure out how to adapt and overcome obstacles so your grandchild can be involved in fun activities such as fishing along with you.

Gwen's advice:

- Be supportive, but be careful not to overstep your bounds. "I have a nursing background and I kept asking Lisa questions about Orion's care." Gwen says. "Finally, Lisa told me to bug off. She told me that she had to do it herself. It was difficult for me, but I understood."
- Try to understand the parents' new life. They may be dealing with insurance issues, Social Security, Individualized Education Programs, and Medicaid. "It's the parent's struggle, but grandparents must realize what a struggle it is," Gwen says.
- Help with childcare. Among other things, Gwen baby-sat, made pancakes out of vegetables because of Orion's food aversions, and held his hand to her mouth while she talked to encourage speech.

Lisa's advice:

- Remember that your child will parent differently than you did, due in part

to personality and generational differences, as well as the fact that he or she has a child with disabilities.

- Learn to be a good caregiver so you can give the parents a break. "I think that was the most valuable thing my mother did." Lisa says. "She also took Orion to play classes. It was hard for me to do it, but she loved it." Both sets of grandparents took infant CPR classes because of Orion's condition, and Lisa attributes Orion's love for socializing to Gwen's ability to hold him for hours at a time.
- Provide time for parents' self care. Sitting with the child for an hour so the parent can take a bath will lessen parental stress. "Orion's other grandmother would do my laundry or just be another person in the house so that I wasn't alone," Lisa says. "That gives you the ability to relax."
- Tell the parents that they are allowed to spend time on themselves, apart from their child with a disability. That makes it okay.

## The Power of Self Advocates, Families and Friends in the Legislative System

By Edgenie Bellah, Deafblind Family Support, TSBVI Outreach

*Abstract: The author discusses legislation that benefits individuals with visual impairments, including deafblindness, passed during the recent 81st Legislative Session in Texas, as well as a recent presidential visit in honor of Helen Keller Deafblind Awareness Week.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, Legislation, Blind, Deafblind, Medicaid Waiver Programs, pedestrian safety, state agency supports.*

June proved to be a big month in Texas for families who have children with visual impairments, including deafblindness. On June 21, Governor Perry finished signing all the bills passed during the 81st Legislative Session. While the smoke clears from a

busy session, individuals with visual impairments, their families, and the advocates that work tirelessly beside them, paused long enough to celebrate what may prove to be the most exciting Texas legislative session for the VI community to date. The

81st Legislative Session saw the passage of important bills that will benefit children with disabilities, such as the establishment of the Medicaid buy-in program for children with disabilities and directives to expand the number of children served by Medicaid Waiver programs. As importantly, the Legislature also considered a record number of bills specific to services for children and adults with visual impairments. These bills included:

- House Bill 37 – makes children eligible for the Deafblind Medicaid Waiver;
- House Bill 63 – creates a career ladder for interveners in the same Waiver;
- Senate Bill 2082 (amended to be part of HB 1343) – would have ensured all children who are blind or visually impaired receive an evaluation in orientation and mobility (O&M) as part of the initial evaluation upon referral to special education; and
- Senate Bill 2249 – would have changed the certification process for teachers of the visually impaired (TVI), eliminating the ability to be certified by exam only.

House Bill 37 and House Bill 63 were signed by the Governor shortly after the legislature adjourned. While SB 2082 and SB 2249 did not make it through the process, great progress was made. This included, among other successes, increasing awareness to the unique educational needs for students with visual impairments.

The success of these bills is due primarily to the efforts of the family organizations DBMAT, TAPVI, Texas CHARGERS, Inc., and the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT), which is a partnership of these and other organizations. To learn more

about DBMAT's experiences, please check out their Legislation Celebration newsletter that can be found at <[www.dbmat-tx.org/newsletters/newsletter.html](http://www.dbmat-tx.org/newsletters/newsletter.html)>.

In addition to the bills sponsored by families, three other bills that passed will benefit the VI community:

- HB 1343 – increases penalties for failure of the operator of a motor vehicle to yield the right-of-way to blind and disabled pedestrians;
- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Legislative Appropriations Request, Rider 3 – increases funding for the Teacher Prep Programs;
- Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division for Blind Services Legislative Appropriations Request – continues funding for the Blind Children's Program at its current level, which includes and secures the expansion that resulted from Fiscal Year 2009 emergency funding request; and
- In addition, the legislature approved the DARS-DBS growth request that provides funding for two new Blind Children's specialist positions.

June is also the month that the nation annually celebrates Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week. On Friday, June 26th, 2009, five young adults who are deafblind met with President Obama. Among these was Crystal Morales from Austin, TX. To learn more about that historic visit, you may wish to read "Still Thriving and Excelling Long After Helen Keller," which is in the News & Views section of this edition. That article, as well as Crystal Morales' personal account, can also be accessed online on the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness home page, <[www.nationaldb.org](http://www.nationaldb.org)>.

## TAPVI TALKS

By Michele Chauvin, President, Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI), Sugar Land, Texas

*Abstract: Leaders in the field of visual impairment and deafblindness recently participated in specific training about collaborating more effectively.*

*Keywords: blind, visual impairment, deafblind, parent groups, interest-based problem solving, parent-school collaboration*

In May, TSBVI Outreach organized a family leadership workshop in Austin for state-wide leaders in the field of visual impairment

### TAPVI



and deafblindness. I traveled with my husband and daughter to attend the training titled "C o m m u -

nicate Effectively: Using Interests-Based Problem Solving (IBPS)", led by professional mediators Laura and Robert Otey. Several TAPVI board members and their families attended, as well.

Along with TAPVI members were key leaders from the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT) and Parents of Blind Children of Texas (POBCT), as well as a DARS/DBS Children's Specialist and a VI Consultant from a Regional Educational Service Center. Seeing the leaders of the various Texas family groups together at one workshop was priceless. During the workshop, we were encouraged to think through common issues between parents and schools. We identified the differences between positions, underlying interests, and options.

The presenters described various types of conflict and how people react differently to conflict. They focused on using open-ended questions and neutral language to help reduce defensiveness and increase understanding. We practiced a possible real world conflict between schools and families then role-played both positions. This helped us, as parents, gain insight into the issues that the "other side" of the ARD table has to consider when educating our children in public school.

Overall, the training reminded us that families, students, CTIVIs, COMS, classroom teachers, special education teachers, related-services professionals, therapists, principals, etc. are all a significant part of the ARD committee or IEP team. The purpose is for us to work together towards a common goal for our children, encouraging them to strive towards greater success and independence in school and in the community.

Thank you TSBVI Outreach for coordinating this interesting and useful workshop. Hopefully, I can remember and use what I learned once school begins this fall and in years to come.

To find out more about TAPVI, go to: [www.spedex.com/napvi/chapters.html](http://www.spedex.com/napvi/chapters.html).

# What the National Reading Panel Says About Teaching Reading to Children with Visual Impairments

By Jim Durkel, Outreach Teacher, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: The entire education team, including the teacher of the visually impaired, classroom teacher, family, and reading specialist, must collaborate to ensure that a child who has a visual impairment develops all of the skills needed to become a proficient reader.*

*Key Words: Effective Practices, blind, visually impaired, collaboration, literacy, reading, research*

## WHAT IS THE NATIONAL READING PANEL (NRP)?

In 1997, Congress asked for a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. For over two years, this panel reviewed research related to the teaching of reading. On April 13, 2000, the NRP finished its work and submitted "The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read." The full report is available at [www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/publications.htm](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/publications.htm).

## WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS OF THE NRP REPORT?

After carefully looking at the research on how to successfully teach children to read, the NRP focused on 5 main skills:

- Phonemic awareness – the ability to think about and play with the sounds in spoken words;
- Phonics – the ability to connect specific letters to the sounds in spoken words;
- Fluency – the ability to read quickly and accurately;
- Vocabulary – the words children must know to speak and read well; and
- Text comprehension – understanding the message in written materials.

Research indicated that successful reading involves all 5 of these skills. The amount of time spent working on these skills may change with the child's abilities and age. For example, phonemic awareness might be emphasized in kindergarten and first grade but not receive much direct attention after that. Phonics might be a focus in first grade but by third grade more time may be spent on text comprehension.

## THE NRP REPORT AND CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

This report does not address any issues specifically related to children with visual impairments. It does not discuss the use of Braille or large print. It did not discuss the use of hand magnifiers or digital video. So in this way, the NRP report says nothing about teaching reading to children with visual impairments.

On the other hand, nothing in the report indicates that reading is a different process for children with visual impairments. Nothing indicates that once a child has access to text, either through Braille or large print or the use of magnification, that reading for children with visual impairments is different from reading for students who are typically sighted. Nothing implies that phonological awareness or phonic skills are any different for readers with visual impairments than for readers who are sighted. Nothing implies that fluency, vocabulary and text compre-

hension are not important reading skills for a child with a visual impairment.

Children with visual impairments must be given access to text; they must be taught Braille if they are tactual learners or they must be given access to print they can see easily and recognize quickly.

However, the NRP clearly finds that reading is more than just recognizing letters—either in print or in Braille. To be good readers, all the areas identified by the NRP must be addressed. Letter recognition is only a small part of the whole reading process.

One study by Carol Gillon demonstrates this issue. “The Phonological-Awareness Skills of Children Who Are Blind” was published in the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 96(1) p. 38-49 (Jan 2002). In this article it was found that Braille readers who had trouble reading had difficulties in phonological awareness skills at the same rate as sighted children who had difficulty reading print.

### **HOW CAN CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS GET INSTRUCTION IN THE 5 AREAS IDENTIFIED BY THE NATIONAL READING PANEL?**

Typically, a teacher for students with visual impairments (TVI) does not have the background in reading that a general education teacher has. Even if the TVI has a certificate to teach general education, the fact is that he or she is not in a classroom teaching reading day in and day out year after year. Often the TVI is not invited to or even allowed to attend in-service training on reading that a school district is offering.

For a child with a visual impairment to get quality reading instruction the best solution is that the classroom teacher (general education, special education, or preschool), the TVI, the reading specialist (if

there is the need for one), and the family work together.

#### *The role of the TVI.*

Conducting a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) is clearly the role of the TVI. The LMA should support the IEP team in its decision regarding the use of Braille in order for the student to be a proficient reader. The LMA should also help the IEP team decide how a child will access print if he or she is to be a proficient print reader. That is, the LMA should specify what print characteristics such as size, contrast, or spacing the child will need or what kind of magnification and/or lighting would be needed. Reading speeds, fluency, and comprehension are also assessed as part of the LMA.

Providing adapted materials and teaching children with visual impairments to use them clearly is the role of a (TVI). Nobody is better prepared to teach recognition of Braille letters or the use of the Braille code. Nobody is better prepared to help a child with low vision to recognize print letters with or without the use of devices.

#### *The Role of the Educational Team.*

If a TVI has questions about conducting and interpreting informal reading assessments, the TVI should confer with the classroom teacher or reading specialist. It is important for the results of the LMA to be shared. For example, slow reading speed might be the result of unfamiliarity with the Braille code or the use of a low vision device, and remediation would then be included in IEP goals. However, it is not acceptable to assume slow reading speed is the norm for all students with visual impairments. A student with a visual impairment might also have a reading impairment that is causing slow reading speed. Addressing this reading impairment should be done by the entire team, not just the teacher for students with visual impairments.

### *The Role of the Family.*

With support from a TVI, families can provide early experiences that will help the child with visual impairments once she or he begins school. Vocabulary is developed as children are given meaningful experiences and the words that go along with those experiences. Nursery rhymes, songs, and simple word games can set the foundation for phonemic awareness. When families read together and discuss what they read, this improves fluency and text comprehension. High interest children's books (in Braille or in print), as well as any low vision device the child might need, gives a child the opportunity to learn about letters and how they go together on a page.

Oral vocabulary, the language that a child can understand and use, is an important indicator of later reading ability. It is crucial that the TVI help families learn how to support early oral vocabulary during the first few years of the child's life. For a child with a visual impairment, good vocabulary development means that the child has lots of hand-on experiences with the world so that every word that is learned is meaningful to the child. The need for experiences to support vocabulary development continues as the child becomes older and is in school. It is important that the classroom teacher understands the impact of vision loss on the child's ability to learn and use new vocabulary taught during instruction and in classroom reading materials.

### **COLLABORATION**

Once a child starts school the need for good collaboration becomes crucial. For example, if the TVI pulls the child out during classroom reading time to focus on teaching recognition of Braille letters and use of the Braille code, is the child missing out on instruction in the areas identified by the NRP? Without support from general education, would a TVI know when and how

to teach the skills identified by the NRP? Without support from the TVI, how would the general education teacher know when a child with visual impairments was failing during a reading lesson due to lack of access rather than due to not understanding the lesson?

There are many ways that a TVI and the classroom teacher can collaborate. Rather than a pull out model where the student is taken out of the general education classroom, it may be possible that the TVI goes into the general education classroom and supports reading activities. This "pull out" vs. "go in" does not have to be an either/or situation. Some reading instruction can be done as pull out and some offered the general education classroom.

Another model of collaboration would involve the general education teacher and TVI meeting on a regular basis to review the lesson plans for reading and to decide who can best teach which skills in which settings in order to get maximum results from the student. Eva Lavigne, from the TSBVI Outreach Program, wrote a great article on how this might work in the area of vocabulary development. This article, "Essential Literacy Experiences for Visually Impaired Children," can be found online at [www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/fall05/essential.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/fall05/essential.htm).

What is clear is that for a child with a visual impairment to succeed in reading in his or her general education classroom, the TVI and general education teacher need to work together. Families are crucial in advocating for this collaboration during the IEP meeting, as well as encouraging and supporting reading outside of the classroom.

A reading specialist may need to be involved if the general education teacher and TVI need help to figure out why a child with visual impairments is having trouble learning to read. Children with visual impair-

ments can have learning disabilities and dyslexia, even when reading Braille. These additional learning problems may be outside the expertise of the classroom teacher and the TVI.

### **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

The following are just two of the many websites that discuss the findings of the National Reading Panel in greater detail.

“Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read” is a longer document that goes into each of the 5 areas in detail: <[www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/researchread.htm](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/researchread.htm)>.

“Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read” is a shorter document about how families can support the 5 skill areas at home: <[www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading\\_first2.html](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_first2.html)>.

## **Early Tactile Learning**

Jeri Cleveland and Debra Sewell, Curriculum Department,  
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: The authors discuss the importance of fine and gross motor development for children with visual impairments. The importance of learning based on hands-on experiences is also discussed.*

*Keywords: Effective Practices, blind children, early development, motor skills*

For many of our students, both blind and low vision, tactile learning is their “pathway to progress.” Parents and TVIs light that path by bringing the world to children and showing others how to do it as well. Visual impairment affects the whole process of information gathering. Far too often we expect blind or visually impaired children to base their knowledge of the world on verbal descriptions and very limited “hands-on” experiences. This cannot compare to the almost constant kaleidoscope of incidental information that fully sighted children have taken in before they go to school. Although we typically think of only blind children as needing tactual skills instruction, low vision students might also be missing crucial information that will affect concept development and functioning abilities.

Research suggests that when sensory input, including tactile input, is imbedded within a purposeful activity, it is mean-

ingful to the central nervous system and can promote learning. Young blind children need families and professionals to provide intense stimulation, motivation and movement. If these children do not become actively engaged in experiences and exploration at an early age, their approach to gathering information is passive and they cannot fully develop their sense of touch. Children with visual impairment must learn to be active seekers of information about their world. This is necessary to gain the essential background knowledge they need to have before they start to school. In the best of all worlds, development of motor, tactile, and visual skills, language acquisition, and concept development happen at the same time through meaningful infant and early childhood experiences.

Real hands-on, do-it-myself experiences are the place to start. Experiences need to be interactive, not all adult-directed. The

child must be actively engaged, and he must initiate some of the movement in order to learn from an experience. It takes many experiences of a similar type to develop one concept.

Providing experiences does not have to be an elaborate, planned event. Simply involve the child in everyday activities. For example, when dressing, allow him to hold the shirt, and help him explore the fabric, the neck, the buttons, the sleeve, the front and the back, while describing and labeling the parts you are touching together. Although this takes a little more time in the dressing routine, your child is gaining invaluable information, concepts, and skills.

Experiences build concepts. A concept is a mental representation, image or idea of tangible and concrete objects (e.g., a chair, a dog); and intangible ideas and feelings (e.g., colors, emotions). Concept development involves more than spatial relationships. It is linking the tactual interpretation of parts to build an entire perception of the whole, and having enough meaningful experiences to find patterns, and make connections and generalizations (tall-ness, hour-ness, dog-ness). We see many different kinds of spoons so we develop the generalized concept of what a spoon is. Therefore a spoon is more than just the baby spoon the child eats with.

In order to be meaningful, language must be based on real knowledge and experiences in labeling, describing, expressing feelings, etc. The overemphasis of oral language without the experiences of moving, touching and doing often results in the use of "empty language." Empty language occurs when the student uses language for which he has no real understanding. We must help our children use the descriptive words that label the sensations and objects they are seeing or touching or tasting or

doing, while they are seeing, touching, tasting or doing them. Start this process early by pairing descriptive language within daily routines even before your child can talk.

Get that baby moving! Remember tactile skills development is dependent on the development of both gross and fine motor skills. Large muscles develop first. Babies need to kick their legs, wave their arms, roll over, creep, and crawl. Fully sighted children are motivated to move by the desire to reach the people and objects they can see. We must provide sensory input that lets visually impaired babies know there are things in their world they want to touch, hold, feel, or taste. Gross motor skills are the foundation for fine motor development. As soon as a child has some control over his large muscles, challenge him to move to the next step by providing him with fun things to do—toys to hold, buttons to push, wheels to turn, and spoons to bang on the table and eat with.

Everyday experiences help develop the skills children need to be efficient tactual learners. They need strong hands and fingers for grasping, squeezing, pinching, and holding. They also need flexibility, dexterity and control which would include movements such as turning wrists, isolating finger movements, and using light touch. Gross and fine motor skills are built upon, improved, and better controlled throughout the years of early childhood. Muscle memory is the ability of the brain to move muscles automatically without conscious effort. It is built over time through repetition of a given set of motor skills. For example, a baby must pull himself up and creep around furniture many, many times before the "step movements" become automatic.

Tactual learning is not the same as visual learning, and it necessitates a lot more touching than we are typically used to. Tac-

tual learning requires that information be gained by exploration of one aspect of an object at a time, and piecing it together to make the whole. It requires immediate proximity and multiple opportunities to explore. Tactual learning simply takes more time. Before children know they can reach out and touch things, the adults have to intentionally set up opportunities for tactile interaction. This needs to start in infancy by increasing movement, interaction, stimulation and access to interesting, and motivating people and objects.

Barraga and Erin (1992) described five levels of tactual learning: awareness and attention; structure and shape; part-to-whole relationships; graphic representations; and Braille symbols. Listed below are activity ideas for the first three levels.

#### **ACTIVITIES: AWARENESS AND ATTENTION**

- Touching an infant's cheek with the nipple of a bottle to encourage the child to seek it with his mouth
- Offering fingers or objects for the child to hold
- Playing with toys that vibrate, move or make noises
- Brushing teeth with vibrating toothbrush
- Playing in water (bath-time), sand, dry beans/rice
- Playing with clay or playdoh
- Finger painting with media of various consistencies
- Taking interactive Discovery Walk outdoors

#### **ACTIVITIES: STRUCTURE AND SHAPE**

- Sorting objects by size and shape
- Making size comparisons

- Identifying various sizes of objects
- Identifying various shapes
- Identifying structural features such as wheels, arms, hollow vs. solid, rigid vs. flexible

#### **ACTIVITIES: PART TO WHOLE RELATIONSHIPS**

- Using blocks or other building toys
- Putting lids on pans or jars
- Putting keys in locks
- Using dials on stoves, washing machines, etc.
- Discovering pages in books
- Making sandwiches

#### **MOTOR ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE PRE-BRAILLE SKILLS**

Listed below, developed by Debra Sewell and Chris Strickling, (1997, 2004), are suggested activities to facilitate early fine motor development.

##### *Grasp*

##### Palmar

- squeezing toys
- squeezing playdough/clay
- squeezing sponges or a baster
- taking objects out of containers
- drawing
- picking up jacks
- sanding
- using a cookie cutter
- using a hole puncher
- putting pop beads together
- eating finger foods

With thumb and fingers

- stringing beads
- holding paper for cutting
- using crayons/pencil/paintbrush
- using glue sticks for art projects
- pinching playdough/clay
- using pegboards
- building towers with blocks
- picking up jacks
- painting with paintbrush
- turning pages of a book
- picking up small beads/objects with tweezers
- paper weaving
- putting shapes into a shape sorter
- sorting paper clips, red hots, goldfish crackers
- buttoning, zipping and snapping - on own body

Pincer

- popping bubble wrap
- picking up small objects
- tying bows
- using pushpins
- sewing cards
- stringing beads
- putting pegs in pegboards
- using geoboards
- putting clothespins on edges of cans or jars
- using an eyedropper
- turning knobs on a wind-up toy
- putting coins through a small slot
- picking up individual candies

Release

- giving an object on request
- stacking activities - cans, blocks, nesting cups
- sorting activities
- placing objects in containers
- using the release that is necessary to complete the activities in the "grasp" section

Rotary Motion (takes place from wrist with stable arm)

- assembling nuts and bolts
- using twist ties
- turning volume knobs on radio & TV
- manipulating lids on and off of jars/tubes
- mixing food in bowl
- turning knobs on water fountains or sinks
- using wind-up toys, busy boxes, music boxes
- turning doorknobs
- scooping sand, gravel, dried beans
- finger painting
- finding objects hidden in sand, dried beans
- unwrapping individually wrapped candy
- pouring from one container to another

Finger Isolation

- making fingerprints in playdough/clay
- pushing objects into playdough
- finger painting with specified fingers
- pushing buttons on tape recorder
- pushing buttons on blender and other appliances

- playing musical instruments
- turning dial/pushing buttons on toy phone
- moving coins/poker chips placed under fingers
- tracing around stencils with fingertip

### *Bilateral Hand Use*

Almost all of these activities involve stabilizing with one hand and manipulating with the other hand, which is hard for VI kids.

- stringing beads
- pulling tape off roll
- tearing paper
- twisting lids on and off
- cutting paper
- using a hole puncher
- sanding
- using a ruler to make lines
- holding container with one hand while placing object in with other
- stabilizing toy with one hand while using other to play with toy
- pushing together and pulling apart pop-beads
- finger painting
- rolling "snakes" and "balls" with playdough/clay
- attaching paper clips to paper
- tracing around an object/stencil
- holding paper with one hand and stapling with other
- stabilizing bowl while stirring, scooping or pouring
- unwrapping individually wrapped candy

### *Hand and Finger Strength*

- crumpling paper
- placing clothespins on edges of cans or jars
- stretching rubber bands
- manipulating playdough
- squeezing glue bottles
- using stapler held in hand
- using stapler by pushing
- using rolling pin
- using a hole puncher
- hammering
- pushing together and pulling apart pop-beads
- pushing together and pulling apart bristle blocks
- squeezing nerf balls
- sponge painting
- popping bubble wrap
- pushing pins into corkboard
- wall push-ups

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# Enriching the Reading Experience for Children with Visual Impairments: Reading to Young Children with Vision Loss

By Holly Allen, Early Childhood Vision Consultant (ECVC),  
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*Abstract: Reading a book with a young child should be fun for both the adult and child. Concrete experiences add meaning to stories. The author shares activities and recipes that can add meaning to three children's books.*

*Key Words: Effective Practices, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, literacy, reading, concepts, essential experiences, early childhood, ECI*

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Books help set the stage for future success. Even at an early age books can be a very important part of every child's life. Reading a book with your child provides an opportunity to nurture your child's growth on many levels including socialization, language and concept development. This is true for both print and Braille readers. The ability to listen to a story is an important skill which will assist your child at school entry. All children benefit from time spent with a caring adult and a good book. However it can be argued that children who have vision loss need this experience even more. Without assistance from parents and caregivers, children who have vision loss are likely less aware of the role of print and Braille in daily life. So take a few minutes each day to read a book with your child. You will be adding much to your child's store of knowledge about the world. Perhaps Dr. Seuss says it best...

*"The more that you read, the more things you will know.*

*The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."*

– *The Places You'll Go*, Dr. Seuss

Books offer the opportunity for parents and caregivers to explore and discuss both familiar and unfamiliar words and ideas with the child who has vision loss. It is also a wonderful activity to share with siblings and peers. It may seem difficult at first to choose books that will be meaningful and

of interest to the young child with vision loss. However, with some imagination and creativity there are many ways to add meaning to the young child who is unable to see the pictures. Where possible use real objects, sound effects and motions to add meaning to the story. The best way to add meaning to a story is to help the child experience in a hands-on way what the story is about. This will add to your child's understanding and enjoyment of the story. Here are some book reviews along with activities which may be helpful as you explore books with your child.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***THE IMPORTANT BOOK***

**BY MARGARET WISE BROWN**

**ILLUSTRATED BY LEONARD WIESGARD**

**A TROPHY PICTURE BOOK, HARPER COLLINS**

**SOFTCOVER PRICE: \$6.99**

This classic book has recently been re-published since first appearing 50 years ago. This simple book will appeal to young readers as they explore what is important to know about everyday objects and experiences such as spoons, shoes, apples, the wind, rain, snow and so on. It would be fairly easy for parents and caregivers to find concrete examples of the objects and experiences mentioned on each page. The text is simple and descriptive.

"The important thing about an apple is that it is round. It is red. You bite it, and it

is white inside, the juice splashes in your face, and it tastes like an apple, and it falls off a tree.”

The pictures on each page vary in visual complexity; some pages are better than others for children with available vision. However, the opportunity to provide hands-on experiences and objects will assist every child to gain understanding of the concepts explored in this book. Words in clear Braille overlay may be easily added to this book.

### *Recipe Tie In: Baked Apples*

After reading this book you may wish to try this simple recipe for baked apples. You may wish to enrich the reading experience by going on a shopping trip to purchase the ingredients. Consider having the ingredient list and recipe available in Braille or large print. It is good to model for your child how important literacy skills are in everyday activities.

#### Ingredients

McIntosh or other baking apples (It is especially wonderful if you have access to an actual apple tree with apples to pick)

Butter

Cinnamon

Brown sugar

The grown up should be the one to cut the apples in half. Show your child how two apple halves can come back together to form a whole apple again. Use a melon ball tool to scoop out the seeds. Here is a good time to discuss what seeds are and how plants grow from seeds.

Show your child how to prick holes in the outside skin of the apple with a fork. If your child is having a hard time managing this skill, try having the child’s hands “ride” on your hands as you work. In this way your child will feel your movements. Piercing the

apple skins will prevent the apple skins from bursting open when the apples are baked.

Place the apples in a glass baking dish. Help your child to smear each apple top with a little butter, and then sprinkle the sugar and cinnamon on top. It is okay if this experience is messy; this is the best way for your child to learn. Keep a damp cloth near by and show your child how to wipe fingers clean if he or she is bothered by having butter on them.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Enjoy smelling the wonderful aroma as the apples are baked. Tasting the baked apples may be the best part!

#### *Expand the Experience*

Consider having a family apple picking and tasting experience. There are so many different kinds of apples available. Try Fuji, Cortland, and Granny Smith apples among many others. If you can, go to an apple orchard to pick them, or simply check out how many kinds of apples are available in the produce section at the grocery store with your child. Buy one of each. Cut each apple into several pieces and have a taste test. Discuss with your child the difference in colour, size, shape and taste of each kind of apple. What apple will be your child’s favourite?

#### *Cinnamon Shapes*

If your child enjoyed baking with cinnamon, then this easy play dough recipe will also appeal. Simply mix together one cup of smooth applesauce with one cup of fine cinnamon. Inexpensive cinnamon can often be found at dollar stores.

Mix together until the dough is workable. If the mix is too dry add a bit more applesauce, if too wet add a little more cinnamon. Once the dough is workable you can use cookie cutters to cut out star, heart or other small shapes. If your child has dif-

difficulties touching the play dough, keep a damp cloth near by so sticky fingers can be wiped when needed.

Poke holes in the shapes with a drinking straw so the shape can be hung with raffia or ribbon. The shapes can be air dried over a few days or baked at 300 degrees for approximately 10 minutes or until firm. The ornaments will smell wonderful when baking, but they are not edible! A cinnamon shape makes a wonderful gift for your child to share with important people in his or her life.

### ***How to Speak Moo!***

**By: DEBORAH FAJERMAN**

**BARRON'S EDUCATIONAL SERIES, INC.**

**WWW.BARRONSEDUC.COM**

**SOFTCOVER PRICE: \$5.99.**

In this lively rhyming book the author explores the language of cows, which is of course "Moo". As we turn the pages we find that the "moos" can be very different depending on what the cow is doing. For example a cow on a trampoline produces "up and down" moos, a cow's mooing into a funnel can sound funny, JELL-O moos are jiggly, and so on. It is fairly easy to add appropriate actions and objects to this story in order to add meaning and interest to a child who has severe vision loss. Items such as skateboards, funnels, JELL-O, tunnels, etc. can be obtained and used at the appropriate page of the book. There are so many rich experiences and concepts available within the covers of this book. And as with any book, the text may be added in clear braille overlay.

For children who have residual vision, the black and white cows may stand out well, although a few of the pages are fairly visually cluttered.

### ***Expand the Experience***

You may wish to expand on some of the subjects introduced in this book. A trip to

the corner store to buy milk, or "moo juice," can be fun. Be sure to include your child in the process of finding the milk in the cooler and paying for the purchase. Your child's understanding of cows can be enhanced by a field trip to a dairy farm, agricultural fair, or other opportunity to learn about cows. All children with vision loss can benefit from supervised and safe opportunities to explore the concept of, "what is a cow?" Children who are learning to use vision aids may find it helpful to look at the cows with binoculars or other distance aids.

### ***Recipe Tie-in: Jiggly Moo JELL-O***

Are JELL-O Moos really jiggly? Help your child find out by making this simple recipe. As much as possible help your child to take part in this process. The first step may be in creating a Braille or large print copy of this recipe.

One 3 oz package any flavour of JELL-O

½ cup evaporated milk

½ cup hot water

½ cup cold water

- Open the JELL-O package. Your child may be able to do so with just a little help from you. Perhaps you can "start" the corner of the box so your child will be able to continue the tear.
- Empty the contents into a medium size bowl. Allow your child to feel and taste the dry powder.
- Use a nesting type of measuring cup to measure the hot water. (Depending on the age and ability of the child this may be the part that the grown up should do.)
- Stir well until the powder is well dissolved. Help your child add the milk and cold water and stir well.
- Allow your child to taste and feel the milky liquid. Place in fridge until set. Enjoy the jiggle!

## **MR. BROWN CAN MOO, CAN YOU?**

**BY: DR. SEUSS**

**PUBLISHER: RANDOM HOUSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

**DATE PUBLISHED: 1996**

**ISBN-13: 9780679882824**

**PRICE: \$8.99**

Here is a book that again discusses the importance of Moos! *Mr. Brown Can Moo* by Dr. Seuss is one of the board books that I like to introduce to children and families early on. This book is rich in rhyme and repetition and features a wide variety of interesting sounds. It is easy to add dramatic sound effects to this classic book.

It can be helpful to have several people on hand to enjoy this book together, as it allows for nice turn taking opportunities. Each person can make the sound the book calls for, either by mouth or by using the sound making toy. For children who are struggling to learn to communicate, this book is ideal for modeling the appropriate response.

Here is the list of items for the sound effects that can be added to the text. It is not necessary to have them all; what sounds you don't have can be made verbally. Sound effects for this book include:

- Moo – any noisy toy with a moo sound. I prefer the moo tins that you turn over to make the sound, but these can be hard to find.
- Dibble Dopp or Rain – rain stick, musical shaker egg, or similar toy shaken in rhythm to the text. A simple shaker can be made by filling an empty plastic candy tube or cardboard chip tube with rice and sealing the lid.
- Tick Tock – small clicker block from Fisher Price, or by mouth.
- Pop Pop – child's wooden music sticks knocked sharply together.

- Cock a doodle doo – noisy puzzle featuring farm animals with the rooster picture. Inserting one block into the frame with the other will activate the sound. Or some small squeeze animal toys feature this sound.
- Knock Knock – knock on wooden furniture or floor.
- Klopp Klopp – use your feet to stamp the floor, or hands banging on the table.
- Boom Boom or Thunder – use a Thunder Tube spring drum or a simple plastic megaphone to make verbal booms louder.
- Splatt splatt or lightening – clatterpillar, which is a child's musical instrument, or pop the bubbles on plastic wrap.
- Whisper Whisper – a soft whisper from you.
- Hoo Hoo – verbally, or stuffed sound owl.

It is especially fun to get to the last page, or "let's review." Then all the noises are repeated in order.

Enjoy reading with your child. In doing so you will be adding a great deal to your child's knowledge of the world, as well as setting the stage for educational and vocational success.

*You may have tangible wealth untold;  
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be—  
I had a mother who read to me."*

Strickland Gillilan

Happy Reading!

# Alphabet Objects

by Terri Bohling

*Abstract: This alphabetical reference list of objects, actions, and food can be used instead of pictures for language development, alphabet books, and other instructional activities. Most of these objects are readily available and familiar to children.*

*Keywords: blind children, education, alphabet books*

This year I had a blind student in kindergarten. One of the table jobs the class did each week was cut out pictures of objects beginning with the letter of the week and paste them on a page for an alphabet book. I developed a list of real objects, small and flat enough to be pasted in a book, for my student to use.

Each week he would paste his real object onto a piece of braille paper. At the end of the year, I put the pages in a large-ring binder. It was a wonderful book for him. As an outgrowth of that list, I expanded to

a listing of real objects that would fit in a manipulative tub.

*Editor's note: What follows is a list of real objects (whenever possible, avoid using plastic replicas) that can be substituted for pictures as the author describes during language and literacy development activities. It is adapted from more comprehensive lists created by the author, which also include additional categories such as body parts, actions, animals, and food. Look for her original lists on the TSBVI web site at <[www.tsbvi.edu/Education/alphabet.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/alphabet.htm)>.*

<b>A</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>H</b>
<i>Object Book</i> aluminum foil, antenna, arrow	<i>Object Book</i> candle (b-day), candy, cardboard, circle, comb, cotton ball, crayon	<i>Object Book</i> earring, eggshells, envelope	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> gift, globe, glue, grapefruit
<i>Manipulative Tub</i> abacus, acorn, alarm clock, album, anchor, antler, apple, avocado	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> camera, can, can opener, candle, cane, cap, cell phone, clay, colander, cookie cutter, crown, cup	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> ear muffs, easel, egg, electric toothbrush	<b>H</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>	<i>Object Book</i> hair, hair tie, handkerchief, heart (shape), headband, hole
<i>Object Book</i> bag, balloon, bandaid, barrette, beads, beans, book, bottle, button	<i>Object Book</i> diamond (shape), dollar, domino	<i>Object Book</i> fan, feather, filter (coffee), fork, fur	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> hammer, handle, hanger, harmonica, hat, helmet, hook, horn, hose
<i>Manipulative Tub</i> ball, banana, basket, battery, beanbag, bell, belt, block, boa, bone, bow, bowl, box, brick, brush	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> diaper, dice, doll, door knob, dress, drill, drum	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> file, film, flag, flash- light, flower, folder, football, frame	<b>I</b>
		<b>G</b>	<i>Object Book</i> inch, incense, ivy
		<i>Object Book</i> glasses, glove, gum	<i>Manipulative Tub</i> ice cream (carton), ice cube tray, iron

**J**

*Object Book*  
jellybeans, juice  
box (crushed)

*Manipulative Tub*  
jacket, jacks, jar,  
jeans, juicer, jump  
rope

**K**

*Object Book*  
key

*Manipulative Tub*  
kazoo, ketchup,  
kettle, keyboard,  
kite, kiwi

**L**

*Object Book*  
lace, leaf, leather,  
lollipop

*Manipulative Tub*  
ladle, lamp, leash,  
lemon, letter, lid,  
life jacket, lipstick,  
light bulb, lock,  
lunch box

**M**

*Object Book*  
macaroni,  
marshmallow,  
match, mitten

*Manipulative Tub*  
magazine, magnet,  
mail, marble,  
marker, mask,  
mat, measuring  
cup, microphone,  
milk (carton),  
mouse (computer),  
mug, mustard

**N**

*Object Book*  
nail, name tag,  
napkin, necklace,  
needle, noodle

*Manipulative Tub*  
necktie, net,  
newspaper, nozzle,  
nut, nutcracker

**O**

*Object Book*  
oatmeal (packet),  
ointment, oval,  
oven mitt

*Manipulative Tub*  
oil, onion, orange,  
ornament, overalls

**P**

*Object Book*  
paintbrush, paper,  
paperclip, peanut,  
pebbles, peg, pen,  
pencil, penny, pin

*Manipulative Tub*  
pajamas, pan,  
pants, pecan, pedal,  
pepper, pillow,  
pipe, pitcher, pizza  
box, plate, plug,  
pocket, popcorn,  
pot, potato, powder,  
pudding, puppet,  
purse, puzzle,  
pumpkin

**Q**

*Object Book*  
quarter, quill

*Manipulative Tub*  
quilt

**R**

*Object Book*  
ribbon, rice, ring,  
rope, rock, ruler,  
rubber band

*Manipulative Tub*  
radio, raincoat,  
rattle, remote, rug

**S**

*Object Book*  
shell, slate, soap,  
spaghetti, spoon,  
square, star, stick,  
straw, string

*Manipulative Tub*  
salt, sand, saucer,  
saw, scarf, scissors,  
screwdriver, shirt,  
shoe, shower  
cap, slinky, sock,  
stockings, stylus,  
sweater, switch

**T**

*Object Book*  
tape, tea bag,  
thread, tile, tissue,  
triangle

*Manipulative Tub*  
telephone,  
thermometer, tie,  
timer, toaster,  
tongs, toothbrush,  
towel, trumpet,  
tweezers

**U**

*Object Book*  
underwear

*Manipulative Tub*  
ukulele, umbrella

**V**

*Object Book*  
valentine, velcro,  
velvet

*Manipulative Tub*  
vacuum cleaner,  
vanilla, vase, veil,  
vest, videotape,  
vine, vinegar,  
violin, visor

**W**

*Object Book*  
washcloth, washer,  
wax, web, wire,  
wishbone, wool

*Manipulative Tub*  
wallet, walnut,  
watch, water,  
watermelon, wheel,  
whistle, wood

**X**

*Object Book*  
x-ray, xerox copy

*Manipulative Tub*  
Xylophone

**Y**

*Object Book*  
Yarn

*Manipulative Tub*  
yardstick, yogurt,  
yo-yo

**Z**

*Object Book*  
ziplock bag, zipper,  
zigzag

*Manipulative Tub*  
zucchini

# Have Dog, Will Travel: an itinerant's quest for skills and understanding through effective collaboration

By Scott Addison, COMS, Region 14 Education Service Center, Abilene, TX

*Abstract: Jay Stiteley of the Seeing Eye went to Abilene to meet with consumer groups, service agencies, and students about dog guides and a range of other issues related to blindness.*

*Key Words: Effective Proactices, blind, visually impaired, Orientation & Mobility, dog guides, The Seeing Eye*

Mr. Jay Stiteley, known simply to the friendly folks here in Texas as "Jay", visited our schools recently. Jay is an associate manager of the outreach division with Seeing Eye Inc. of Morristown New Jersey. The Seeing Eye,® Inc. is the oldest existing dog guide school in the world. Many know Mr. Stiteley as an inspirational speaker, adroit traveler and experienced dog guide handler. Jay lives with wife Karen, a teacher of the visually impaired, in Houston, Texas. Jay and I, along with others, sought to promote skills and understanding through effective collaboration during the course of his three day tour of Region 14 in West Texas.

## COLLABORATION

Jay and I arrived at an Abilene, Texas coffee shop and bookstore on a cold Saturday in late January, to meet briefly with American Council of the Blind (ACB) and National Federation of the Blind (NFB) members regarding the Braille awareness event planned for later in the day. We eventually made our way across the street to a local restaurant for lunch where we met up with students, parents and professionals.

## SKILLS

We seated twelve students and collaborators for lunch. It was soon apparent that the almost-nine-year-old, Jordan, was not happy with his seat assignment. He was seated on the end of the table with his stale

old mobility instructor (the author of this article) that he'd heard for years droning on and on about such boring things as "watch your arc width, center that hand, and is that a good place to park your cane?" I could see Jordan's wheels turning... all the action was clearly taking place on the other end of the table, and the best thing was, there was another blind guy down there just like him talking about really interesting stuff! Jordan was reseated, and we got down to some of the best Italian food I've had in quite some time. Jay instructed, modeled, and seemed to delight in the audience we'd assembled for him. He helped the kids review the Braille menu, address wait staff, figure tip and tax, and even offered tips on how to use a bread pusher! We had cordial conversation, a nice lunch, and a good opportunity to learn and practice skills.

Following lunch we trekked back across the street to the coffee shop in a collaborative effort designed to promote Braille awareness (understanding/skills). The ACB and NFB members, along with Jay, set up technology and handouts for anyone interested. The students set up Mountbatten and Perkins Brailers and other technology. For two hours the children and adults demonstrated Braille reading and writing. The Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (CTVI) from the West Central Texas Shared Service Agreement (SSA) special education cooperative and the Certified Orientation

and Mobility Specialist (COMS) from Region 14 Education Service Center networked and answered questions.

## UNDERSTANDING

On Monday we took the show on the road to schools in Region 14. In addition, we visited the local Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Division for Blind Services (DBS) office.

East Ridge Elementary in Sweetwater, Texas was our first stop. There we met with a third grader with visual impairment, his classmates, and about one hundred other interested youngsters and teacher-types. Jay presented information on dog guide travel and living as a person with blindness. He also talked about ways he works around visual impairment by using his dog and other skills learned over the years. In addition, Jay provided information regarding dog guide etiquette.

After lunch Jay repeated his lecture to an equally large and enthusiastic gathering of elementary school students and teachers at Bonham Elementary in Abilene, Texas. A nine year old with blindness attends this school. Local media covered Jay's address and printed a nice article. We were very pleased about the coverage, as the information provided in the article did a nice job explaining blindness and visual impairment (understanding).

Our next stop was Mann Middle School in Abilene for a brief one-on-one visit. The student with blindness at this school had an opportunity to ask Jay questions related to dog guide travel, check out Jay's dog guide Hagar while out of harness, and examine the harness itself.

Jay and I eventually headed to the local DBS office before a final sprint to the air-

port where Jay was to catch a late afternoon flight to Florida for more ambassadorship (skills, collaboration, understanding). Upon entering the small state-issue sedan for the trip to the airport, Jay remarked, "Hagar is getting a bit tired..." This was Jay's diplomatic way of saying, "That's enough after 120 miles of travel, three schools, and the DBS office!" I promptly retorted, "I aim to get my money's worth!" Quick wit that he is, Jay responded by telling me that "two times nothing is still nothin'!" You see, the Seeing Eye sends Jay all over the country to speak to interested parties regarding visual impairment and dog guide travel at no cost to the host!

I want to thank Jay Stiteley, the Seeing Eye, local adults with visual impairment, professionals, parents, and students for making this road show possible. Oh, and thanks to Hagar as well; he was a very good boy and seemed to enjoy our travels despite the time spent a small state-issue sedan!

*Editor's Note: Scott Addison is the orientation and mobility consultant for Region 14 Education Service Center in Abilene, and former Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired residential instructor and paraprofessional.*

*Jay Stiteley sent the following about his availability for events such as his January trip to Abilene as described by Scott.*

*If you would be interested in arranging a presentation to learn about the excitement, skills, and responsibilities of independent travel through the use of a Seeing Eye dog, please contact Jay Stiteley by phone at 713-664-7128, or send an e-mail to: <jstiteley@seeingeye.org>. Presentations can be stand-alone talks to students, or serve as part of an event or workshop for parents and/or students.*

# Together We Can!

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

*Abstract: This article reviews the "Together We Can!" conference, a joint project of DARS DBS, DARS ECI, TSBVI, Region 13 ESC, with input from educators and stakeholders from across the state.*

*Key Words: blind, visually impaired, Division for Blind Services (DBS), Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Tanni Anthony, Susan LaVenture, National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI), Together We Can!*

As I write this, I have just returned from the "Together We Can!" conference, a conference for professionals providing services to families of birth to three-year-olds with vision loss. This conference was a group effort: the planning team members came from a variety of organizations, including DARS Division for Early Childhood Intervention Services, DARS Division for Blind Services, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, education service centers, independent school districts, and universities. In addition, the presenters were experts from many fields, including education of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility, optometry, and occupational therapy.

What a glorious two days of learning and making new connections! The "Together We Can!" conference had more than 300 participants, consisting of parents, Early Intervention staff and specialists, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, DBS Blind Children's staff and specialists, and many others.

The highlight of the conference was... Well, there were too many highlights to choose just one. The conference began with a plenary session by Dr. Tanni Anthony. Dr. Anthony's expertise is recognized nation-

ally and internationally, so I won't use this space to list her accomplishments and honors—believe me, they are numerous! Dr. Anthony reminded us of the importance of sensory learning. Sensory-based learning begins in utero and continues through the

rest of our lives. She transmitted this with humor, telling stories from her varied past of working and living in Colorado, Minnesota, and Alaska. From Dr. Anthony I learned that when working with a child with sensory deficits, it is my job to become an environmental engineer—to analyze and build an environment that is supportive of sensory learn-

ing. Sensory learning occurs when the child is in a state of self-regulation; when external and internal stimulation is present, the child is able to maintain physiological and behavioral functioning.

Friday's plenary session featured Susan LaVenture, the executive director of the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI). Ms. LaVenture leads and directs the association's programs that serve families throughout the United States, providing information, support, and networking resources, while strongly focusing on the significant role parents play in their children's development, education, and medical care. Ms. LaVenture spoke from her heart about the journey of a parent to understand the

*...none of us can meet the range of needs of these children and families alone.*

medical diagnosis, impact of disability on a child's development, and the need for parents to connect with each other for emotional support. She emphasized the importance of collaboration, and discussed her collaborations with the medical community, other parents, and service organizations.

Afternoon topics included literacy, early movement, eye conditions, cortical visual impairment, developmental assessment, and feeding. Dr. Anthony discussed concepts and skills associated with early literacy development, and recommended key strategies to reinforce literacy development in the first years of life. Dr. Rona Pogrud discussed the importance of early movement for young children with visual impairments, with a focus on the impact of visual impairment on the development of motor skills. Dr. Laura Miller and Nan Bulla, low vision specialists, presented an overview of eye conditions and diseases that are most commonly found in early childhood, discussing implications, accommodations, and practical ideas for each condition. Rebecca Killian-Smith, a Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, discussed cortical visual impairment, a leading cause of blindness in children. Dr. Virginia Bishop, teacher of the visually impaired, university instructor and author, provided training in conducting a visually appropriate developmental assessment. Occupational Therapist Carol Ramberg discussed the importance of developing a cooperative partnership between the adult and child during feeding.

In addition to these topics, there were panel presentations. The "From Play to Pay" consumer panel consisted of a parent of a toddler with CHARGE syndrome, a high school student, a college student, and two working adults. These panelists emphasized how important it is for parents and professionals to encourage exploration and independence, and to instill a belief in oneself that helps to overcome obstacles. The

"Who's Who on the VI Team" session defined the roles of each discipline that might be represented on a child's team, reviewed the referral process for Early Childhood Intervention, DBS Blind Children's Program, and VI services through the Local Education Agency, as well as services available through the Education Service Centers and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

One of the highlights for me was the snippets of conversation I heard as I roamed through the crowd and spoke to the participants: the ECI staff who stated that this was the first training she had attended on visual impairments and, now that she had connected to her DARS Blind Children's specialist, she was planning a follow-up training when she returned to her home office; the parent who sought out the high school panelist to ask for advice on handling her nine-year-old son who didn't want to be "different;" the panelist and participant advising a concerned parent to "trust yourself;" plus all the participants who asked if next year's conference would be at the same time and place!

Throughout the two days, the message was repeated: "Together We Can!" Just as it took a diverse group of people to make this conference a reality, it will take professionals of varied backgrounds to provide the best intervention to families of young children with visual impairments. Everyone comes to this field with their own education, experience, and expertise, but none of us can meet the range of needs of these children and families alone. We must work together to promote successful outcomes for the infants and toddlers we serve. To paraphrase Carol Ramberg from her presentation on feeding, the approach we take is one of "creative choreography," a "line dance" of parents, caregivers, relatives, therapists, teachers, and agency specialists, working together with graceful ease to support the children and families of Texas.

## New Campus, New Opportunities

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

*Abstract: Superintendent Daugherty discusses the remodeling project at TSBVI and the opportunity it presents to improve and expand TSBVI services and impact the field.*

*Key Words: William Daugherty, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, blind, visually impaired, remodel*

The near-total rebuild of the TSBVI campus, to be substantially completed by 2012, is really taking shape. Foundations will be poured any day now and then the project starts heading rapidly upward. We'll move into the new Main Building 600 at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, with many of the other projects following close behind. What all of this investment and effort needs to amount to is not a simple moving into new spaces. It is also a time to assess what we as a school do best—to do more of that—and to be sure that we are asking our statewide stakeholders what they want and need from us.

We have repeatedly heard from parents and others that the appearance of our campus and facilities is a big disconnect from the high quality of the services we provide. The new campus will bring nice changes on that front as our staff can put more attention to maintaining buildings and grounds that are in good shape, rather than spending so much time and money patching up the old stuff. Our goal is to capitalize on all of these physical improvements by looking top to bottom on how we serve our students and the state, and how we go about the business of operating the campus.

Several key areas of concern and opportunity come to mind as we look forward:

- How do we best equip and maintain this wonderful new campus for future generations of students and educators? Yes, kids return to their home districts or graduate from here, and staff retire or move on to other opportunities. Within two decades it will be rare for anyone who is here today to still be working at TSBVI. We are building this new campus as much

for those that follow as for those of us who are here now.

- How do we best meet the needs of the state in which we reside and to whom we are responsible for being the primary central resource for services and expertise? We've got to ask a lot of questions of our stakeholders and we've got to be prepared to listen and respond. Most of

what we do and how we do it now will continue to be highly regarded by the people and systems we serve, but if we ask and listen we'll also hear new opportunities to improve and expand our impact in collaboration with our statewide partners. The continued relevance of our school absolutely depends upon this.

- How do we ensure that we are achieving our shared goal of maximizing each student's learning, independence, and sense of self-worth? We'll need to increasingly foster a culture of acces-

*As challenging as this construction project has been, people seem genuinely excited about the future it heralds.*

sibility to all information used by both students and staff. Just look around our campus and you'll see important print and graphic information that is largely inaccessible to some of our co-workers and to many of our students. We'll need to foster even greater levels of independence in our students with a combination of higher expectations and the time for them to figure out where they are and what they are doing with fewer prompts and assists from staff. This doesn't mean less supervision—it means, among other things, more wait time and less talk during activities. Many of you are experts on this, and you need to spread the word to the rest of us.

As challenging as this construction project has been, people seem genuinely excited about the future it heralds. I've pored over every architectural plan and drawing, and it is still really hard for me to envision what TSBVI will actually look and feel like in 2012. Clearly, a parent or a local Teacher of the Visually Impaired driving up to scope out the campus for a prospective student will get a feel from the outside that's closer to the feel of what's happening in the instructional programs. There is no greater concentration of talent and creativity in any School for the Blind than exists at TSBVI, and there has never been a more important time to put all that to good use as we chart our path.

## **Families Can Now Apply for CHIP, Children's Medicaid Online**

News Release from Texas Health and Human Services  
<[www.hhs.state.tx.us/news/release/052209\\_CHIPAppOnline.shtml](http://www.hhs.state.tx.us/news/release/052209_CHIPAppOnline.shtml)>

*Abstract: This article announces the new online application for Children's Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).*

*Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, disability, health insurance, children, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)*

Parents can now apply for state health coverage for their children from the convenience of their home computer at any hour of the day or night. A new online application for Children's Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is now available at <[www.chipmedicaid.org](http://www.chipmedicaid.org)>.

"Over the past couple of years, we've made it possible for families to pay their enrollment fees or renew their CHIP coverage online," said Texas Health and Human Services Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins. "The online options have quickly become very popular, and I hope the online application will offer families another very convenient way to apply for health coverage for their children."

CHIP and Children's Medicaid provide 2.4 million low-income Texas children with health care coverage at little or no cost to the families. A family of four earning up to \$44,100 a year may qualify for coverage.

The online application uses an interview format to collect information about the family's income and expenses. The application takes about 20 to 30 minutes to fill out, and parents have the option of saving their work and coming back later to finish the application.

Once all the questions have been answered and the application is submitted, parents can use the website to check the status of their application. The state will send a copy of the completed application

back to the family for a parent's signature, and the family will need to fax or mail the state copies of documents to verify the family's income and expenses.

Parents will need to have some information handy when completing the online application:

- Social Security numbers for the children seeking coverage.
- Recent pay stubs or other information about the family's income.

- Information about expenses, such as child care, child support or alimony.
- Information about any health insurance currently covering the children.

Families also can request a copy of the CHIP and Children's Medicaid application at <[www.CHIPmedicaid.org](http://www.CHIPmedicaid.org)> or start an application by calling 1-877-KIDS-NOW (1-877-543-7669) from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Central time, Monday through Friday, except federal holidays.

## Soft Skills: The Competitive Edge

Excerpt from the U. S. Dept. of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy website <[www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm)>

*Abstract: This excerpt from the U.S. Department of Labor website discusses an in-depth survey of employers that reveals the importance of "soft skills."*

*Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, disability, employment, soft skills, workforce*

What do employers look for in new employees? According to the 2006 report *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, it may not be what some young job seekers expect. This in-depth survey of 461 business leaders conducted by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and Society for Human Resource Management reveals that while the three "R's" (reading, writing, and arithmetic) are still fundamental to every employee's ability to do the job, employers view "soft" skills as even more important to work readiness. The report also finds that younger workers frequently lack these skills, which include:

- Professionalism or work ethic
- Oral and written communication
- Teamwork and collaboration skills
- Critical thinking or problem-solving skills

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) discussed the importance of such skills with the Circle of Champions, a distinguished group of U.S. businesses that have received the Secretary of Labor's New Freedom Initiative Award for innovative and proactive efforts to recruit, hire, and promote people with disabilities. As part of this dialogue, the companies identified the competencies as key to the success of young workers in the 21st Century workplace. Go to <[www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm)> for a discussion of these competencies and for additional resources.

## Schedule Boxes by Chotu Sharma

Reprinted with permission from Chotu Sharma's business brochure

*Abstract: This article provides a resource for custom-made schedule boxes and information about the woodworker.*

*Key Words: blind, visually impaired, schedule boxes, Chotu Sharma,*

If you would like custom-made schedule boxes, Chotu Sharma is your go-to guy! He makes boxes with one, two, three or four compartments in a variety of sizes.



He accepts orders for painted or unfinished boxes. He will also create a box to your specifications.

Standard four-compartment boxes come in bright white, kettle black or sunny yellow. All boxes are made from aspen, poplar, or pine. The sizes are:

- Small: 14.5-inches long, 3.5-inches high, 4-inches deep, with 3-inch wide compartments
- Medium: 18.5-inches long, 5.5-inches high, 6-inches deep, with 4-inch wide compartments
- Large: 24-inches long, 5.5-inches high, 6-inches deep, 5.5-inch wide compartments.

Cloth compartment covers are available in black or white. These are attached with Velcro at the back of the box.

Shorter schedule boxes, with one, two or three compartments each, are also available. These are constructed with 3-inch, 4-inch or 5.5-inch compartment widths.

Chotu attended elementary school in up-state New York and middle school at Texas

School for the Deaf. For most of his high school years, he was a homebound student in the Austin Independent School District; it was during these years that he developed an interest in woodworking. He graduated from AISD in August, 2007.

Chotu has always loved to work. He has been supported in his woodworking by Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, his family, and several dynamic, dedicated, and caring teachers. He currently works with a job coach on a regular basis. Chotu is very proud of his boxes and excited to be selling them to people who appreciate and enjoy using them.



Chotu lives in Austin, Texas with his parents and his dog, Saffron. His grandparents from India visit often and reside with them for long periods. In addition to boxmaking and all kinds of household jobs, Chotu enjoys people, community trips, shopping, holidays and celebrations, taking pictures, puzzles, cycling, and movies.

To order any schedule box and to obtain a price list and shipping estimate, contact Chotu at [psharma@austin.rr.com](mailto:psharma@austin.rr.com) or (512) 407-9188. Chotu works from a schedule of orders set up by date of receipt; new orders will be completed after November 1, 2009. September marks the start of Chotu's third year of business.

## Still Thriving and Excelling Long After Helen Keller

By Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy,  
Reprinted with permission of the author and photographer from the Whitehouse BLOG,  
<[www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Still-Thriving-and-Excelling-Long-After-Helen-Keller](http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Still-Thriving-and-Excelling-Long-After-Helen-Keller)>.

*Abstract: On Friday, June 26th, 2009, five young adults who are deafblind met with President Obama to help raise awareness of issues surrounding deafblindness.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblindness, Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week, presidential visit*

Another day at the White House, another chance for President Obama to make history for people with disabilities. And, he did just that.

On Friday, June 26, 2009, President Barack Obama became one of the very few sitting American Presidents to personally greet and welcome persons who are deaf-blind to the White House Oval Office.

They were in D.C. to celebrate Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week. This year's theme for the week was Deaf-Blindness Didn't Stop with Helen Keller. The focus of the week was to demonstrate that successful deaf-blind persons are still thriving and excelling long after Helen Keller.

The week culminated with their visit to the White House. They visited the White

The group featured five young adults (Crystal Morales, Kelvin Crosby, Virginia Jordan, Divya Goel, and Jason Corning) affiliated with the Helen Keller National Center ("HKNC") including a musician with two CDs to her credit, a surfer and aspiring field goal kicker, a Cum Laude graduate who wants to start a school, an aspiring restaurant manager, and a winner of the Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children "Yes I Can" award for Advocacy and Independent Living. Two staff members and 3 volunteers from the HKNC also joined the young adults.



House in the morning, where they received a tour of the public residence. From hanging out in the First Lady's East Reception Room, to playing the same piano played by Stevie Wonder, to visiting the China Room, the tour was a major hit with the young

adults. They returned in the afternoon for the icing on the already incredibly rich cake to take a photo with the President in the Oval Office. The President congratulated the young adults on their accomplishments and reminded them that we remain committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

This visit was not and should not be viewed as a sympathetic thing for the President to do. Rather, it reflects this President's com-

mitment to, and understanding of, the desire for all people with disabilities to be fully integrated into society. These young adults are proof that if provided with the necessary supports and services, people with disabilities can and will achieve anything they desire. Recognizing Deaf-Blind Awareness Week by inviting these young adults to the White House further solidifies the extraordinary commitment of this entire administration to all people with disabilities.

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

**TEXAS FELLOWS**

*Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters*



- Texas Fellow**  
 Terry Gaines  
 Terry Gaines  
 Diane Sheline  
 Brenda Jackson  
 Anita Pineda  
 Susan Butler  
 RosaLinda Mendez  
 Carolyn Rimka  
 Tressie Schindler  
 Sara Baker  
 Theresa Taylor  
 Kathy Krenek

- Candidate**  
 Cindy Harber  
 Monica Campbell  
 Monica Johnson  
 Lisa Gray  
 Alma Soliz  
 Julie Moyer  
 Carolyn Metzger  
 Elizabeth Meeks  
 Charlotte McKinney  
 Stacy Vance  
 Tammy Averitt  
 Julie Stanfield



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  
<<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm>>.

## **Some changes are coming to *TX SenseAbilities*!**

In 2010 *TX SenseAbilities* is going greener, and jumping deeper into the digital age, by directing more readers to our web-based edition found at <[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)>. In order to conserve Project resources and take it easier on the planet, we would like quit automatically mailing paper copies to people who don't want/need them. Soon we will begin collecting e-mail addresses from our readers, and adding them to our database, so we can send an announcement and link when a new issue is published on the web. Look for details in the mail the coming months. And never fear: a paper version will still be an option for readers who are aren't able to use our web edition!

The Texas Deafblind Project at TSBVI  
presents:

### **2009 Introduction to the Intervener Team Model**

**September 24–26, 2009**

This workshop is designed for newly assigned interveners, or experienced interveners who have not yet had the opportunity to attend this introductory training. Intervenors should attend with a professional member of the educational team.

There is no registration fee. Attendance is first come, first served. A limited number of hotel rooms has been reserved at the Courtyard Austin Downtown/Convention Center. Limited funds are available as needed to assist districts with the costs of substitutes, travel, lodging, and meals.

To get more information or registration materials, see <[www.tsbvi.edu/news.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/news.htm)>, or contact Brian Sobek at 512-406-6946; <[briansobek@tsbvi.edu](mailto:briansobek@tsbvi.edu)>.

## **Envision Conference '09**

### **A Multidisciplinary Low Vision Rehabilitation and Research Conference**

**September 9-12, 2009**

**Westin Riverwalk Hotel in  
San Antonio, TX**

Envision Conference '09 features four tracks of continuing education, workshops, and research and poster presentations. The adjacent exhibit hall features vendors from all over the country displaying the latest in technology and services in low vision rehabilitation as well as book publishers and optometric suppliers.

You may register quickly and conveniently online, or, you can download the registration form from the site and mail it to Envision.

The instructions are on the conference website:

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

## The Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas

### 37th Annual Family Conference "Realizing Our Dreams!"

October 16th - 18th, 2009  
Camp John Marc (near Meridian, TX)

This learning weekend is for **adult family members and service providers.**

Because DBMAT wants both parents and extended family members to attend and participate in the program sessions, we have made **exceptional on-site child-care available for your children with disabilities and their siblings.** Children have their own planned activities for fun, separate from the adult learning sessions and activities.

Come prepared to learn, participate, have fun, make friends and enjoy.



The conference registration form is available online at: <[www.dbmat-tx.org](http://www.dbmat-tx.org)>.

For more information, please contact:

Christine: 281-370-8195

Steve: 512-336-7859

Positive Connections Line: 432-264-6780

Rosa (Spanish language): 915-595-3853

## 4th Annual Texas Chargers Retreat

October 23 & 24, 2009

**Camp Allen Retreat  
and Conference Center,  
located near historic Navasota  
in Grimes County**

We look with anticipation and excitement for making this the biggest and best retreat to date. We are confident that this retreat will offer some of the nicest amenities and most spectacular surroundings but more importantly, a place where our children, families and volunteers can share quality time together. For those not familiar with Camp Allen, please visit their website at <[www.campallen.org](http://www.campallen.org)>.

You may also visit our web site at [www.texaschargers.org](http://www.texaschargers.org) for more information regarding registration and volunteer applications and to see the pictures from last year. You won't want to miss a great opportunity to network with other families in Texas, gather information and have a lot fun.

Faith, hope & love,

Texas Chargers, Inc. Board

For more information:

Cathy Springer, President

Texas Chargers

2718 Loyaga Dr.

Round Rock, TX 78681

512-255-3176

[dacspringer@austin.rr.com](mailto:dacspringer@austin.rr.com)

## Short-term Programs for Academic Students School Year 2009- 2010

### Fall Semester 2009

September 13–18	Elementary Access to Academic Skills #1 (grades 1-5) Access
September 24–27**	Low Vision Tools & Strategies: Secondary
October 4–9	Junior Access to Academic Skills #1 (grades 6-8) Access
October 15–18**	Orientation & Mobility for Teachers and Their Students
October 25–30	High School Access to Academic Skills #1 (grades 9-12) Access Individualized instruction in areas of Expanded Core Curriculum <u>or</u> Special Focus: Preparing for College
November 1–6	Math Tools and Concepts (taking algebra or more advanced math class) Access
November 12–15	Chemistry Tools and Concepts (high school) Access
December 3–6**	High School Independence Weekend #1: Camping (grades 9-12)
December 10–13**	Elementary School Independence Weekend #1 (ages 9-11)

### Spring Semester 2010

January 10–15	High School Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 9-12) Access
January 21–24**	Looking Good (self care, independence, sexuality, socializing, manners)
Jan. 31– Feb. 5	Elementary Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 1-5) Access
February 21–26	Junior Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 6-8) Access
March 25–28**	“Traveling with Low Vision” Weekend (grades 9-12)
April 8–11**	High School Independence Weekend #2: Prom (grades 10-12)
April 15–18**	Low Vision Tools & Strategies: Elementary
May 6–9**	Elementary School Independence Weekend #2 (ages 6-8)
May 13–16**	Junior Independence Weekend (grades 6-8)

\*\* – Weekend Program—students miss only one day of school.

“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; braille literacy; ILS; and other areas from the Expanded Core Curriculum. For Access classes with a “Special Focus,” students may work in that area or choose any other area of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

More information is available at: <[www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/short-classes.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/short-classes.htm)>.

If you know a student who may benefit from any of these programs, or if you would like to share or receive additional information, please contact:

Dr. Lauren Newton, Principal of Special Programs

Phone: (512) 206-9119 • FAX: (512) 206-9168 • email: [laurennewton@tsbvi.edu](mailto:laurennewton@tsbvi.edu)

# **HKNC National Training Team**

## **2009 Seminar Calendar**

**September 20 - 25, 2009**

### **"IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES"**

Expanding the Curriculum for Travelers  
Who Are Deaf-Blind  
(Orientation & Mobility)

Participation in this seminar is limited to Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS), Nationally Certified Cane Instructors, agency trained mobility instructors with 5 years of experience under a certified specialist, and dog guide trainers, who are currently teaching or supervising in their field.

**October 19 – 23, 2009**

### **"EMPLOYMENT: THE ULTIMATE GOAL"**

Professional Development for Employment  
Training Specialists

During this seminar, the participants will utilize the Personal Futures Plan Mapping System to discover individual preferences in order to explore the most appropriate employment categories. This combined with the best practices in marketing and accommodations for the person who is deaf-blind will provide the tools to achieve the desired outcomes.

Training is held at the Helen Keller National Center – Sands Point, NY

Cost of Seminars: Full week: \$550. Includes lodging, meals, professional training and manual. 6-day Orientation & Mobility Seminar - \$625

Schedules are subject to change.

For more information about these seminars, contact:

Doris Markham – NTT Administrative Assistant

Phone: (516)-944-8900 Ext. 233/239; TTY: (516) 944-8637; Fax: (516) 944-7302

E-mail: [ntthknc@aol.com](mailto:ntthknc@aol.com)

Information is available online at: [www.hknc.org/FieldServicesNTT.htm](http://www.hknc.org/FieldServicesNTT.htm).

**November 16 – 20, 2009**

### **"THE MAGIC OF TECHNOLOGY"**

Adaptive Technology Training for Teaching  
Deaf-Blind Individuals

This seminar demonstrates the technology, the software and the methodology for teaching a wide variety of adaptive equipment to consumers who are beginners and/or advanced students in the world of technology. Vendors will demonstrate the latest state of the art technology and participants will have access to availability and funding resources.

**January 11-15, 2010**

### **"TOUCHING LIVES"**

Interpreting Techniques for the Deaf-Blind  
Population

Participants must be working interpreters with working skills. The seminar will allow participants to apply the knowledge and skills that are learned throughout the week to the hands-on interpreting activities. Participants will leave the seminar with a working set of skills that will empower them to work comfortably within the deaf-blind community. RID CEU and ACET credits will be available.

# TX SenseAbilities

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1100 West 45th Street  
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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March 1st for the Spring edition  
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September 1st for the Fall edition

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