

# TX SenseAbilities

A Publication about Visual Impairments and Deafblindness for Families and Professionals

Summer/Fall 2013 • Volume 7, No. 3

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Internationally known artist Guido Dettoni came to Austin in February, 2013 to create a Handsmatter art creation experience with students who are deafblind, along with their teachers and interveners from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He also guided experiences in mutually developing tactile art at the 2013 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness. See a report on the outcome and links to video in News & Views on page 23.

## Proud to be Unique

By Elizabeth Armstrong, student, Tyler, Texas

*Abstract: A student describes her experience growing up with albinism. She explains what tools she needs to be successful in the classroom, the skills she has learned, and her experiences living with a visual impairment.*

*Keywords: albinism, Family Wisdom, visually impaired*

My name is Elizabeth and I am 15 years old. I'm in the 8th grade this year. I was born with a condition called albinism. Albinism is a genetic trait that I inherited from both my parents; both parents need to have the albinism gene to pass it on. Because of my albinism, I am visually impaired and have very pale skin and hair. I also have an eye condition called nystagmus; nystagmus is the rapid movement of the eyes from side to side and is uncontrollable. I am very pale because I was born with no pigment in my eyes, skin, and hair. Since I am visually impaired I use special tools to help me see better. I use a magnifier to read things with small print and a telescope to read things that are too far for me to see. I am also learning to use a cane. A cane is used by people with low vision or blindness to help them travel safely and independently. The cane is used to detect drop offs such as curbs, steps, or stairs. The cane is also an indication to others that the person is visually impaired.

Albinism is a rare condition and not a lot of people know about it. So when someone sees me they don't really understand why I look different; so because I look different I get treated differently. I have been called all sorts of names because of the way I look. I've had people come up to me and start petting my hair or talk to me like I'm a five year old. Just because I look different people assume that I have a learning disability. Because of my visual impairment, I have trouble doing things like everyone else; driving, reading books with small print, and seeing things from a distance are difficult for me. There are a lot of things that I am able to do but people underestimate my abilities.

When I explain to people what albinism is they start to feel sorry for me but they really shouldn't. Because of my albinism I get to go to summer camps for people with visual impairments. I've received an iPad from my caseworker who works for an agency that helps people with visual impairments. I flew to Austin for a short course at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I get to go off

campus to do orientation and mobility with my VI teacher who is wonderful, beautiful, and skinny! (that's an inside joke!) I also get to go to The Lighthouse where I learn to cook and sew and live independently. Even though some people may think my hair is strange; I like that I look unique. Because of my visual impairment, I may be eligible for a college tuition waiver which will allow me to attend college.

When I think about it, having albinism has more positives than negatives. Everyone has something that they struggle with. I know that I have to deal with bullying and having a visual impairment, but considering all the great things I get to do; it's worth it!



Elizabeth Armstrong

## Lost Pines Elementary Student Speaks at Texas Senate Hearing

Reprinted with permission from the Bastrop ISD *The Communicator*, May 2013

*Abstract: This article shares the story about a kindergarten student's making first experience with being an advocate for people with visual impairments by testifying with her mother at a Texas Senate committee hearing.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, deafblind, advocacy, Orientation & Mobility, Texas Legislature*

On April 25, Lost Pines Elementary Kindergarten student, Minnie Pineda-Allen, spoke at a Texas Senate Hearing as an advocate for Texas Senate Bill 38. The bill, filed by Senator Judith Zaffirini, passed the Senate requires an Orientation and Mobility (O & M) Evaluation for special education students with a Visual Impairment or Deafblindness in Texas.

According to the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans, O&M is a service specific to students who are blind or visually impaired. O&M teaches these students how to safely move in the environment and to know where they are going. The impact of requiring O&M Evaluations is that more students with low vision, who may function adequately in familiar environments, but have difficulty in unfamiliar or poorly lit environments or at night, will receive evaluations and services.

As Minnie spoke to the Senate Education Committee, she stated "My name is Minnie and I love my mommy very much."

One of the Senators stated, "Well Minnie, that was the best testimony we've heard." Minnie, who is visually impaired and deafblind, is currently receiving O&M services with Bastrop ISD.

"We are very fortunate to have such a wonderful and caring O&M specialist for Minnie, and as her parent I am grateful that Minnie will continue to build and acquire proper cane techniques. Ultimately all of her O&M training will ensure Minnie to lead a more full, independent and productive lifestyle," says Nancy Allen, Minnie's mother, "This has been a wonderful school year and she enjoys learning new skills, like using a tactical map to help travel safely and efficiently around the school campus with her cane."



In Texas from 2011-2012, there were 8,968 children (from birth to 21 years) with visual impairments. Only 34 percent of those children with visual impairments are receiving O&M services and only 56 percent have received an O&M evaluation within the past three years.

"Ultimately, an early O&M evaluation is critical because movement teaches the brain; safety creates confidence; and a sense of well-being and real experiences are essential to children," says Nancy.

The O&M bill also passed the Texas House of Representatives (HB 590) on May 2 and was filed by Rep. Elliott Naishtat.

## Where Did It Go?

By Wayne Thompson, Parent, Sweetwater, TX

*Reprinted with permission from In Touch, the newsletter of the Deafblind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), June 2013 edition. To learn more about DBMAT and to become a member, please visit their website*

*Abstract: A father shares his families experience and encourages other families to begin planning now for the time when their children with disabilities become adults.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, Deafblindness, multiple disabilities, transition planning, adult services, advocacy*

Soon after our son Caleb became ill, I began hearing words like; future planning, transition, family dynamics, waiver programs, special needs trust, guardianship, and many more. Caleb was only four or five years old. I kept hearing these words and phrases at each conference and workshop we attended. I heard speakers and workers expressing the urgency of becoming focused on these issues. I remember feeling as though I had plenty of time for all of that when Caleb got a little older. Well, guess what? Caleb turned eighteen years old this past September!! I had plenty of time. I just don't know where it went!

I was able to get legal guardianship with the help of my gracious niece, who happens to be an attorney. That was relatively simple. I am now being faced with the decision of how much longer to send Caleb to school. After all, school does provide seven hours of respite, if nothing else. I had no clue how it would affect our lives and Caleb's when our family dynamics changed. I thought about how helpful Caleb's big sister, Dugan and younger brother, Kevin have always been. Now Dugan is no longer living at home and I didn't realize how much I depended on her, until she went away. Next year, Kevin will graduate and be going away to college. Then it will just be Caleb, his mom and his dad at home. About that same time, Caleb will be aging-out of many programs that are available to him and his family.

As many of you already know, when your CHILD becomes an adult, the programs out there just are not as numerous as they were when he/she was younger. It also appears that Caleb's parents are aging as well. His care is becoming increasingly more difficult due to his age and size. Along with the fact of life that I am not sure what programs are out there that will serve my medically fragile son and our family.

I heard a story in a workshop that I attended once. It was about planning a vacation to Paris but then being diverted to Holland instead. I feel we are about to land in Holland! It will be a new place with numerous new connections to make and many new challenges to face. This makes me realize that I should have been advocating years ago to make the waiver program more suited to our loved one's needs – as well as the needs of their family. Now, I am facing uncharted territory. Oh, but I had PLENTY of time to prepare for all of the changes about to take place! WHERE did it go???

For those of us involved in advocacy for our loved ones and others, let us realize the URGENCY that faces all of us as we try to make things better. WE need to strive to eradicate the interest lists that exist to acquire services. What good are these programs if they are not available to all those that qualify and need them for their lives to continue in a caring and respectful manner?

I would also like to PLEAD with the families in DBMAT and other support groups to become fervent in their efforts to continue to advocate for our vision and the goals for all our loved ones. It is IMPERATIVE that we keep the work of DBMAT going strong and to get stronger. The only way to do this is for each of us to become actively involved in helping to shape our loved one's future. Let's not look back years from now and say, "Where did the time go?" NOW IS THE TIME to grow and build a future for our loved ones and all those coming after us.

*\*\*Just a note to families who have young children with challenges; you have plenty of time to prepare for the future, but yesterday was not too soon to start!!*

## Parent Leaders – Use Your Experience to Make a Difference

By Laura J Warren, Texas Parent to Parent

*Reprinted with permission from the Texas Parent to Parent newsletter, 2013 Summer edition. To learn more about Texas Parent to Parent, please visit their website <www.txp2p.org>.*

*Abstract: The author shares how parents of children with disabilities can “pay it forward” by being effective family leaders.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, family leadership, parents, disabilities, experience, systems improvement/change.*

I am probably one of the most reluctant parent leaders that you will ever meet! I hate public speaking; I'm much happier working at my desk than in meetings. I never set out to be the Executive Director of TxP2P — I came back to the office one day from a meeting and was told that was my new title (there were only 3 of us back then)! But I was taught by my mom, both in words and actions, that if you can make things better for others, you do. Not for the rewards you reap but because it helps! So when my son, Jason, survived the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) and continued to grow and thrive, I came to a decision time — do I forget what we went through and go back to a job in architecture or do I help others get through the NICU experience. About that time, Jason was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and the decision was made — we were in this disability thing for life.

So how do you become a parent leader and what does it mean to be one? There are as many different paths as there are parents. We had a mom call once who only wanted to talk with one staff member because she was embarrassed that she cried so much — she went on to be very active in the Texas Legislature and made a difference for thousands of Texas families. Others call to start a parent group for support, respite, emotional support, to change their school, or something else they felt was needed in their community. Our staff has been working in parent support for so long that we have talked to someone about almost anything you can come up with - so if we don't know how to help you do what you want to do, we probably know someone who does.

At TxP2P, we see becoming a volunteer as the first step to leadership. You “Pay it Forward” — someone provides you a shoulder to cry on or a hand-up to make necessary changes and you turn around and do the same thing for another parent who is just starting on this journey. You can become a TxP2P Supporting Parent Volunteer and provide support for families who have children like yours or for an issue you have faced such as NICU or Transition experiences. Then maybe you move on to Legislative issues through our Advocacy Network or display our materials at a fair or speak at a conference through the Speaker & Outreach Network or become Family Faculty and train Pediatric and Family Practice Residents through our Medical Education Program. Maybe then you go on to start a parent group and get support through our Parent Group Network. These are all examples of parent leadership! So, do you want to be a parent leader? If so, contact us - we can help! 866-896-6001 or email me at <Laura@txp2p.org>.

## Using YouTube to Inspire Your Kid to Love the Long White Cane

By Edgenie Bellah, Deafblind Family Support, TSBVI Outreach,  
and Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS)

*The Family Wisdom Editors wish to thank ViStars, Inc. for giving us permission to include Precious' parody song about her cane in this article. ViStars students are producing a “music video” of the song and plan to post it to their website soon. We encourage you to visit their website.*

*Abstract: The author shares her favorite YouTube videos that provides inspiration for families promoting a love of the long white cane as an effective Orientation & Mobility tool.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, Orientation & Mobility, self-advocacy, family strategies*

As a mom, I am often blown away and overwhelmed by the realization that I play such a big role with my sons developing their own beliefs and attitudes as they become men. Thankfully, it is a daily, moment-by-moment decision that takes a looonnggg time to happen. And thankfully, we also have the ability to stop from time to time and consider taking on a different approach. Maybe even a different philosophy.

As one of the family support gals with the TSBVI Outreach team, I get to call it my job doing what I love — supporting families and watching them lead us into some pretty awesome systems improvement. I also spend some time away from TSBVI doing something else that I'm pretty passionate about — teaching Orientation & Mobility (O&M) to adults. There is something pretty cool about witnessing people be confident travelers, especially when you get to see all their hard work pay off by improving their safety and independence. Recently, I had the pleasure of working with a young lady who had such joy for life and for her independence that she often broke out in a little dance when she learned a new environment. Her enthusiasm was great to watch but she was never content to dance alone. She often grabbed me and invited me dance alongside her. It was so much fun, especially the follow-up conversations with other pedestrians interested in our little celebration. While I believe she was born with a natural bent towards being enthusiastic and independent, I also know a lot of it came from growing up in a family that encouraged such character traits.

Today, I saw a YouTube video of Precious Perez singing a parody song about her cane. This young lady can sing and her message is powerful — she will never, ever live without her cane! Why? Because she figured out that is one of her tools for independence. Want to find a fun, creative way to encourage your child to feel proud about using his or her cane? This is a great one to share! Want to see other fabulous YouTube videos to inspire your family to start young and bring that cane everywhere? Check these out:

- Blind White Cane Rap,
- Watch me go!!! Blind preschooler uses cane
- 4 Year Old Gavin Using His White Cane To Navigate Down a Curb Independent

And just in case you want to braille Precious' song for your kiddo, they are available on [vistar.org](http://vistar.org) on her blog (#17)



## Beep Kickball

By Judy Byrd, Parent and Volunteer Director of the Beep Kickball Association

*Abstract: Judy Byrd conceives beep kickball, a team sport designed specifically for children with visual impairments. Establishing local beep kickball teams led to the founding of the Beep Kickball Association. The Association promotes the sport by providing support and resources for developing a team and securing equipment.*

*Keywords: Beep Kickball, Beep Baseball, visually impaired, adapted sports*

### Our Story

In 2010, Beep Kickball was founded by Judy Byrd while volunteering with the Atlanta Beep Baseball Team. She noticed all the players were older teens and adults and wondered what sport the kids played. Then it came to her- beep kickball. Same rules, different ball!

### Our Mission

Our mission is to enrich the lives of all people, young and old, who are visually impaired through participation in sports. The direct benefits are the same as any team sport: confidence, camaraderie, exercise, and sportsmanship. The indirect benefits to the blind community are those that impact their everyday life: increased mobility, agility and independence as well as a willingness to try something new. They all say "If I can do this, I can do anything!"



*Judy Byrd coaching beep kickball.*

There are currently several beep kickball teams in Atlanta and more being formed. There is also a monthly event- Beep Kickball Play Day. Currently, Beep Kickball is being played in over 40 summer camps and schools for the blind across the nation!

### Our Profits

ALL profits from equipment sales are used to promote Beep Kickball and give discounts to struggling organizations that serve the blind community

### How Is Beep Kickball played?

Beep Kickball is an adapted sport for people who are visually impaired or blind. It is played on a flat grassy field with a ball that beeps and two bases that buzz. There is no second base, no throwing the ball and no running around all the bases. There are six players on each team and everyone wears a blindfold to equalize the differences in vision. Simply explained, the kicker kicks the ball and runs to tag the buzzing base, either first or third. If he tags the base before a fielder picks up the ball, he is safe and scores a run. If a fielder picks up the ball first, the runner is out. Three outs, six innings, game over!

### Equipment Needed For Beep Kickball

All equipment sold by the Beep Kickball Association is guaranteed for one year. After a year, just return it and it will be repaired for free.

### The Kickball

One kickball is recommended for a group of 12 to 15 kids but two is recommended for a group larger than 15. Half of the group can be practicing the skills while the other is scrimmaging. A kickball costs \$130 plus \$10 shipping.

### The Bases

Use your beep baseball bases if you have them. If your budget allows, order a set for \$300 from Qwest Telecom Pioneers.



*Judy Byrd coaching beep kickball.*

If that is over your budget, order a set of beep kickball bases for \$100 on this site. This set consists of two blowup 4 foot tall punching bags modified with weight to stand upright and two buzzers in a box. The bases are soft and accommodate a tumbling runner.

The third alternative is to order a hand held buzzer in a box for \$20.

And worst case, clap your hands for free!

## The Blindfolds

If your budget allows, purchase 12 MINDFOLD blindfolds here for \$144. One size fits all. Or purchase them directly from Mindfold at [www.Mindfold.com](http://www.Mindfold.com).

Most Dollar Stores sell inexpensive blindfolds or strips of cloth work just fine!

Beep Kickball Association Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and all donations are tax deductible. All staff are unpaid volunteers so all donations will go directly to making the sport available to kids, teens and adults who are visually impaired.

## These rules are suggestions for RECREATIONAL play with novices:

- For elementary kids, the field is set up like a baseball diamond with first and third bases 60 feet from home plate and 10 feet outside the baseline. For older kids and adults, the bases are 80 feet, the foul line is 30 feet and a home run is 100 feet. Adjust the distances according to your group's sizes, ages and abilities
- Every player wears a blindfold to equalize the differences in vision.. I recommend everyone practice for a few minutes first without a blindfold and that very young children not be required to wear one until they are comfortable.
- The six fielders are placed in the field per the diagram. Encourage them to stay on their side of the field to pursue a ball and talk to teammates while moving.
- The umpire hands the beeping ball to the kicker and he places it on the ground and kicks it. For novices, there are no strike outs. Most kids kick the ball on the first try. The ball has to be kicked farther than the 25 foot foul arc and inside the baselines to be a fair ball. A fly ball kicked outside the 80 foot arc is a home run.
- Then the kicker runs to the base that buzzes (they are buzzed randomly), either first or third, trying to get there before a fielder picks up the ball. If he misses the base, he should go back and tag it. If he tags the base before a fielder picks up the ball, he scores a run. If the fielder picks up the ball first, the runner is out. Three outs, six innings, game over!
- A sighted field spotter is in the field with the players to help them locate the ball by calling their name or number when the ball is kicked toward them.
- Be sure to have enough sighted safety people to yell STOP, STOP, STOP if a collision is imminent.

## These rules are for COMPETITIVE play:

- For elementary kids, the field is set up like a baseball diamond with first and third bases 60 feet from home plate and 10 feet outside the baseline. For older kids and adults, the bases are 80 feet, the foul line is 30 feet and a home run is 100 feet.
- Every player wears a blindfold to equalize the differences in vision.
- The six fielders are placed in the field per the diagram. A sighted field spotter calls a number one through five to tell the fielders where the ball was kicked. After calling the number once, the field spotter is silent during the play.
- The umpire hands the beeping ball to the kicker and he places it on the ground and kicks it. He may place kick it, run and kick it or drop kick it. The kicker is allowed three clean misses before he is out.
- Foul balls count as a strike unless it is the third. The ball has to be kicked farther than the 25 foot foul arc and inside the baselines to be a fair ball. A fly ball kicked outside the 80 foot arc is a home run.
- Upon kicking the ball, he runs to the base that buzzes (they are buzzed randomly), either first or third, trying to get there before a fielder picks up the ball. He must tag the base. If he tags the base before a fielder picks up the ball, he scores a run. If the fielder picks up the ball first, the runner is out. Three outs, six innings, game over!
- If a play is stopped because of an imminent collision, another play is allowed as if the first play never happened.

## CONTACT US

For more information or questions, contact Judy Byrd, volunteer Director at 770-317-2035 or [JudyByrd@gmail.com](mailto:JudyByrd@gmail.com).

To watch a good video on beep baseball, go to <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125054739963438235.html#articleTabs%3Dvideo>.

To watch a few video clips of beep kickball, go to Facebook- Beep Kickball Association and LIKE us!

Website: [www.beepkickball.com](http://www.beepkickball.com)

## Health Care Reform – What does it mean to your Family? Affordable Care Act – Obama Care Whether You Agree or Not, There are Good Changes on the Way

By Laura J Warren, Texas Parent to Parent

*Reprinted with permission from the Texas Parent to Parent Newsletter, 2013 Summer edition. To learn more about Texas Parent to Parent, please visit their website.*

*Abstract: Learn about the health care changes being implemented this year that will impact people with disabilities.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, disabilities, health care reform, health care benefits, parents*

Texas Parent to Parent has the Family to Family Health Information Center grant for Texas and because of that, I have slowly learned more and more about the Affordable Care Act (ACA). I have never had to purchase health insurance - I grew up in the 50's & 60's when insurance was provided through your Dad's job. Since then, I got insurance either through my job or my husband's. When my husband retired and COBRA ran out, we started looking for insurance and what a shock it was! I have watched costs go up and benefits go down since I was in my 40's but when you are in the private market for insurance, you finally realize what everyone is talking about. What fit our budget was the highest deductible and basically only catastrophic coverage. Our prescriptions and doctor visits are not covered. My son, who almost never goes to the doctor but was a preemie and has mild Cerebral Palsy, was denied twice before we had to go to the Texas High Risk Pool Insurance Plan to get his insurance. And we're the lucky ones who can get insurance! Now, I can't wait until January 2014 when all the benefits of the ACA will take effect.

### WHAT WE WILL GET FROM ACA IN 2014:

- Adults with pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied insurance OR have to pay more for it OR in my language - my son can't be denied insurance again!!
- In 2010, insurance companies can no longer set lifetime limits on your care AND in 2014, they cannot set a limit on a dollar amount spent on specific care OR when a child is born and spends the first year in the hospital, insurance won't run out before they come home!
- Creates a Health Insurance Marketplace: The Marketplace is designed to help you find health insurance that fits your budget, with less hassle. You can compare all your insurance options based on price, benefits, quality, and other features that may be important to you, in plain language that makes sense. There will also be a toll-free hotline for consumer support, "Navigators" for consumer assistance (these won't be commissioned insurance agents), and online resources. Open enrollment in the Marketplaces starts October 1st, 2013.
- Families will be eligible for tax credits that will help pay for insurance premiums based on income and the size of their family as well as assistance with out-of-pocket expenses such as co-pays, deductibles, and co-insurance. Many families will be eligible for this help - one report I heard helped families with incomes over \$92,400 for a family of 4.\*
- Small business owners will get more relief with tax credits and affordable insurance choices in the new competitive Health Insurance Marketplace in every State. TxP2P might be able to offer health insurance to our staff!

### WHAT WE ALREADY HAVE NOW FROM ACA:

- Children with pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied insurance OR have to pay more for it. Have any of you decided not to change jobs because you would lose insurance for your child? We certainly faced that when our son was younger.
- Young adults get an extra year on their parent's insurance, until age 26 instead of 25 even when they don't live with their parents.
- You and your family can get some free preventative care - see this site for a list of care covered: <http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/2010/07/preventive-services-list.html> There are exceptions, determinations and grandfather clauses on this piece of the law but if I can get my annual physical for no co-pay, it's still good!

Of course, as with any medical care, covered services will still have to be considered "medically necessary," there will be exclusions and limits and prior authorizations. Nothing new there!

How many of you struggle to find doctors who will take your insurance? Or a doctor who will see your child and has the expertise to care for your child? Or one who wants to provide a medical home for your child? Another aspect of the Affordable Care Act is to reduce costs and increase access to health care - here are some of the ways it will do this:

- Invests in training and supporting thousands of new primary care doctors and nurses by providing bonus payments, scholarships and loan repayment, and new training opportunities.
- Builds and improves community health care centers that take Medicaid.
- Insurance companies cannot rescind or take away coverage when people get sick just because of an unintentional mistake on an application. It also provides for a new right to appeal an insurance company's coverage decision and provides consumers with information and assistance to give them more control over their health care decisions.
- The health insurance companies have to meet the 80/20 rule, or Medical Loss Ratio, where they must spend at least 80 cents of your premium dollar on your health care or improvements to care. If they don't, they must provide a rebate to their customers. We received a rebate last year!
- For the first time ever, insurance companies must publicly justify any rate increase of 10% or more. And the law gives States new resources to review and block these premium hikes.
- Insurance companies must provide clear, consistent and comparable information about their health benefits and coverage.
- The Affordable Care Act creates a new type of non-profit health insurer, called a Consumer Operated and Oriented Plan (CO-OP). These insurers are run by their members. CO-OPs are meant to offer consumer-friendly, affordable health insurance options to individuals and small businesses.

For more information on any of these options, check out the website [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) or in Spanish, <http://www.cuidadodesalud.gov/law/index.html>

For more information on the Health Marketplaces: <http://marketplace.cms.gov/index.html> and [www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/about/eligibility/index.html](http://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/about/eligibility/index.html)

\*From Henry Kaiser Family Foundation:

FAQ's: <http://kff.org/health-reform/faq/health-reform-frequently-asked-questions/>.

Subsidy calculator: <http://kff.org/interactive/subsidy-calculator/>. Each exchange is required to provide a calculator on their website.



## TAPVI Talks

By Jean Robinson, Advisor

*Abstract: The Texas Association for Parents of Children with Blindness and Visual Impairments (TAPVI) updates news about their organization. The mission of TAPVI is to inspire and support parents of children with visual impairments to become empowered to guide their child in achieving full potential in all aspects of life*

*Keywords: family wisdom, parenting, support group, visually impaired, TAPVI*



This year the members have made a big effort to represent TAPVI at regional events such as the Braille Challenge at the Region 1 Educational Service Center in Edinburg, Family Weekend at the Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired and White Cane Day in Austin and in Harlingen

In March, board members made a presentation at the Texas Association for the Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER). A panel of students and young adults talked about their activities outside of their school day and how fulfilling it is to get involved in their communities.

In April they hosted a Family Fun Day with the support from Region 1 Education Service Center and TSBVI Outreach. Over 60 family members attended the Family Day in McAllen. TSBVI Adapted



*Ivan bowling along with his parents John and Veronica Delgado.*

Physical Education Teacher, Joe Paschall demonstrated how children with visual impairments can participate in sports in their own school and community. Everyone got a chance to play games in a local church gym before meeting at a nearby bowling alley for pizza. It was satisfying to see family members bowling for the first time. Families learned that they can use existing resources in their own community to make unforgettable memories.

In June, TAPVI sponsored a resource table at the Destination II Wonderland event in San Antonio. Lots of families and professionals learned about our organization which resulted in new connections and memberships.

Elections were held online and by mail. The new officers are:

Isela Wilson, Past President (Rancho Viejo)  
Joe Paschall, President (Austin)  
Veronica Alvarez, Vice-President (Round Rock)  
Linda Hulett, Treasurer (Houston)  
Alison Brown, Secretary (Houston)  
Veronica Delgado, Member at Large (Edinburg)

Check out our new website at [www.tapvi.com](http://www.tapvi.com) to find resources and connections that offer support to families. A membership application is included. Please consider joining our effort to reach out to families so that no one feels alone. If you are interested in meeting other families in your area, TAPVI can help you plan a fun family event. Just contact Joe Paschall at 512-206-9191 or [pasachallj@tsbvi.edu](mailto:pasachallj@tsbvi.edu) or Jean Robinson at 512-744-3005 or [robinsonj@tsbvi.edu](mailto:robinsonj@tsbvi.edu).



*Peter joins in the fun with his brother Christian at Family Fun Day in McAllen*

## App Camp: Teaching iDevices for the Blind.

by Seth Wilson, Instructor and IT Administrator, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Tyler, TX

*Abstract: The East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind Organized an innovative program called App Camp for students who are Blind or Visually Impaired.*

*Key Words: Effective Practices, iPads, Apps, Camp, Lighthouse for the Blind*

A schoolgirl flicks her fingers across the screen as she listens to a children's book. An artist pinches his fingers apart to enlarge a digitized version of his own work. An aspiring neuroscientist shares what he's learned from an online lecture. All these students are blind or visually impaired, and they're using their iDevices to improve the way they learn, and live, thanks to an innovative program called App Camp.

App Camp is the brain child of Ann Phillips and Seth Wilson, both employees of East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind. The program has two phases. First, students come to The Lighthouse's state-of-the-art Rehabilitative Services facility for a day of intensive face-to-face training, dubbed "Boot Camp." The students, ranging in age from 8 to 18, learn the fundamentals of their iDevice. At the outset some of them don't even know how to turn their iPads on, but by the end of the day they're surfing the web, sending e-mail, and downloading apps, all thanks to built-in accessibility features like VoiceOver and Zoom. Just as important, they make new friends and learn to use one another as resources. And did I mention free pizza provided by DARS?

The second stage of App Camp is where the real magic happens. Through the hard work of Region 7's Kerry Oliphint and the generosity of Tyler Junior College, sessions are broadcast directly to the students' schools. Students from as far apart as Canton and Cayuga come together virtually, while



Seth's teaching is broadcast from the TJC campus. While Boot Camp gives the students a basic set of tools, the three virtual App Camp sessions—iLearn, iOrganize, and iGet Around—teach them how to do amazing things with those tools. iLearn opens up whole new ways of learning, from e-books to podcasts to free university content. iOrganize helps them keep track of all that new-found knowledge and share it in meaningful ways. Finally, iGet Around turns their iDevices into their own personal guides,



helping them get where they're going and find things to do when they get there.

The enthusiasm surrounding the program has taken its creators by surprise. For one thing, it's not just for students anymore. By popular demand, Seth has developed a similar curriculum for VI teachers, empowering them not only to better help their students, but to get more out of iDevices in their own work and lives. A special App Camp for O&M instructors

is in the works. The program has also enjoyed a small amount of success on the local lecture circuit. Seth presented the idea at the South by SouthWest conference in March, and to a board meeting of Lighthouse Industries for the Blind of Texas not long after.

App Camp isn't about the networking opportunities, though, or the novel teaching techniques. It's not even about the sleek cool gadgets and flashy apps. It's about the lives of the students getting better, their world opening up, even just a little. Everyone involved in making App Camp happen is



emotionally invested in seeing these kids grow. Because without that, what is all this technology for?

*Seth Wilson was born in Hawaii with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. He graduated with his BA in History at UT Tyler and went on to earn his MA from Oxford University. He hopes to earn a Ph.D. in English and spend his life teaching and writing. He currently works at The Lighthouse as an instructor and IT administrator.*

## Destination II Wonderland 2013

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

*Abstract: Assistant Commissioner Madrigal describes Destination II Wonderland events*

*Key Words: News and Views, Morgan's Wonderland, Blind, visually impaired, DARS, Division for Blind Services, Destination II Wonderland 2013*

Destination II Wonderland 2013 was a great success! Three hundred families came to San Antonio on June 13 -16 to learn new skills, build new support systems, and have the opportunity to be a "regular" family.

I want to express my appreciation for all our partners who joined us on this journey. We worked closely with Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Education Service Centers 1,5,6,7,9,10,11,14,15,16,and 20. We received contributions from many private and corporate sponsors. Without our stakeholders, partners, sponsors, and volunteers, Destination II Wonderland 2013 would not have been possible.

Thursday evening was the kickoff to the weekend events with a general session. After the excitement of a false fire alarm, the families enjoyed an evening of opening comments and brief description of services provided by 10 different resource organizations. We had two very special inspirational speakers: Brittany Holland Wacasey – a champion barrel racer and industrial arts teacher who does not let her visual impairment get in her way. Her motto is, "Tell me that I can't do it, that I shouldn't even try, and I will." Our second speaker was Susie Welch, who shared personal stories of the joys and struggles of raising her son Jaceson. She spoke of her family's work with Deaf-Blind Multi-handicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), and testifying in legislative hearings on behalf of the deaf blind community.

Over 1,700 consumers, family members, and volunteers spent Friday at Morgan's Wonderland. Every activity in the park is adapted to accommodate special needs participants and families were able to experience all that the park had to offer. There was pure joy on the faces of children and parents alike as they made their way through the park. They enjoyed many activities such as the carousel, the train, and the fishing wharf where they would cast a line in hopes of catching a fish. The mayor of San Antonio, Julian Castro, even stopped by to welcome the families to his great city.

On Saturday, the families had an opportunity to engage in hands-on training. There were 45 different activities for the families to choose from that ranged from learning/practicing daily living skills to build educational experiences, which included: sorting and folding socks, emptying the dishwasher, making experience books, braille activities and playing adaptive games, the whole family learning Orientation

and Mobility skills under blindfold, and even line dancing! Fifty vendors were on hand to share information about their program and/or products.

Educational partners, state agencies, consumer organizations, and parent/community based organizations were all together in one place. You would think that happens a lot – but it doesn't. We talked with one another, shared information about our programs, and brainstormed ways to form stronger partnerships to ensure that families get information they need and how to ensure this happens across the state. This resulted in better partnering, sharing information, and getting services to our consumers.

Destination II Wonderland 2013 gave families the opportunity to spend time as a family, to play, relax, and network with other families. One parent shared how their confidence increased after successfully traveling out of town with their child for the first time. Siblings were able to hang out and have fun together and learned that they were not the only family with a special needs child. As one mom said, "we got to be normal this weekend and we loved it." Families began to ask how they could become more involved, they volunteered to help with fund raising to ensure that the conference would happen again, and expressed an interest on how to start and get involved in parent support groups once they get back home. A parent expressed this clearly when she said, "I want to become more involved, I am hungry for more information and meeting more families."

The Division for Blind Services' vision is a Texas where people who are blind and visually impaired enjoy the same opportunities as other Texans to pursue independence and employment. In order to do that, we look for opportunities to change people's perceptions. Destination II Wonderland 2013 was a good illustration of how this happens. Let me give you a few examples: by the end of the weekend the large hotel staff knew that children with visual impairments were first and foremost kids. One bellman said, "this weekend we are working for hugs and I have already gotten three." They saw young children using canes and getting around the hotel with no problems. They observed competent adults, who were blind or visually impaired, volunteering and working as hard as their sighted counterparts, resulting in a shift in their perception.

A business partner got involved on the local level looking for ways to "help blind children." She enjoyed her interactions with the area staff and she volunteered to come to the event. She is now talking with us about how to create employment opportunities for our adult consumers in her business, resulting in a business partner ready to put someone to work.

The goal for the conference was to provide families with a meaningful event that would build confidence, strengthen skills, and increase independence so our consumers can reach their fullest potential. Seeing people change their perception about what blind and visually impaired Texans can do was an added bonus!

## TSBVI Holds Open House in Celebration of New Campus

William Daugherty, TSBVI Superintendent

*Abstract: Superintendent Daugherty reflects on the open house celebration for the new TSBVI campus.*

*Key Words: News and Views, TSBVI, blind, visually impaired*

On April 4, 2013 TSBVI welcomed visitors, students and staff to an open house out on the patio next to the cafeteria. About 200 visitors attended the event that began just as the skies cleared after a threatening thunderstorm moved on to other locales. Among them was Dr. Natalie Barraga, formerly of TSBVI and the University of Texas, and Dr. Tuck Tinsely, President of the American Printing House for the Blind. Refreshments and tours of the campus followed a brief talk by the Superintendent and by TSBVI Board of Trustees President Joseph Muniz of Harlingen.

The current TSBVI campus was first built in 1916, and was surrounded by open pasture land. Old records indicate that the school grew an amazing amount of its own food on the property. We loved our old buildings, but after 97 years it was time to start fresh. The citizens of Texas voted for a bond issue to improve state facilities, and the Texas Legislature approved TSBVI as a site in need of these funds. Our former Superintendent, Dr. Phil Hatlen, was largely responsible for making the case that TSBVI needed to be rebuilt, and was joined by our CFO, Barney Schulz, in working the request through the administrative and political process.

The project has been a long and winding road. Had the campus been built on open, flat ground it would have been relatively easy. But this was a tear-one-down build another in its place process. We had many power outages and interruption of other utilities as digging machinery severed old lines that were not where we thought they were. Through all of this we didn't miss a single day of school or have a significant accident with students or staff. This is largely because our staff was hyper vigilant about safety, and our students were real troopers about the ever-changing routes through the construction zone.

The commitment shown by the Texas Legislature to TSBVI and its future by funding this project is unparalleled by any state in the U.S. in many decades. We believe that the way TSBVI carries out its mission, with a focus on improving educational opportunities for all students in the state who have visual impairments, was key to the Legislature's decision to invest in our future in such a big way. The outcome is spectacular. TSBVI now has high quality facilities that reflect the high quality of our students and staff. The campus is beautiful, and we intend to keep it that way. Come visit.

## Handsmatter Workshop

Excerpt from TSBVI website, Texas Deafblind Project blog <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/blog/dbproject>>

*Abstract: This article provides information about the TSBVI's Handsmatter video that can be found on you tube.*

*Key Words: Handsmatter, deafblind, TSBVI, tactile symbol for Deafblindness,*

On February 21, 2013 a Handsmatter <<http://handsmatter.tk>> workshop took place with deafblind students and their interveners and teachers at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Austin. The workshop was led by the European artist Guido Dettoni.



Handsmatter at TSBVI Video: <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSGzAcM3ESU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSGzAcM3ESU)>

Share Your Comments and Interpretations on YouTube

The artist also facilitated the Handsmatter workshops with participants at the Texas Symposium on Deafblindness in Austin, TX on February 22-23, 2013. An unexpected experience with 8 hands together evolved.

8 HANDS Video: <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_MWTsD80c-8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MWTsD80c-8)>

Thanks to the support of TSBVI, NESHER Stichting and FESOCE (Spanish Deafblindness Federation). Previously Guido Dettoni had performed with APSOCECAT the first Handsmatter workshop oriented to this community. Out of this experience arose a tactile symbol for Deafblindness, the DEAFBLINDSHAPE <<https://sites.google.com/site/deafblindshape>>. For more information on the Deafblind Tactile Symbol and/or the Handsmatter workshop, contact Jenny Lace at <[Lacej@tsbvi.edu](mailto:Lacej@tsbvi.edu)> or <[jennyelace@gmail.com](mailto:jennyelace@gmail.com)>

## Usher Syndrome Family Survey

By Kate Hurst, TSBVI Outreach

*Abstract: TSBVI is interested in helping families who have children with Usher Syndrome get-together and learn more about Usher Syndrome. This short survey will help TSBVI learn the best way to provide support to families living with Usher Syndrome.*

*Key words: News and Views, Usher Syndrome, TSBVI, deafblind, blind, visually impaired,*

There is a survey for parents of students with Usher Syndrome or Retinitis Pigmentosa and Deafness that we would appreciate getting out around the state. It is available in both English and Spanish. Would you please help us by sharing this information with the appropriate families in your area? <http://s22318.tsbvi.edu/surveys/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=1&SurveyID=32Hm87405o21G> – English version

<http://s22318.tsbvi.edu/surveys/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=1&SurveyID=3K1ml7417p45G> – Spanish version

It is our hope to connect with these families to offer a variety of training and support resources that they feel they need. Please feel free to distribute widely.

If the family does not have access to the information via computer and would like to have input to the survey, please have them contact Edgenie Bellah at 512-206-9423 or for Spanish, Miriam Miramontes at 512-306-9268. They will be able to help the complete the survey by phone.

## Parenting Special Needs

By Gay Speake

*Abstract: The author provides information on a free on line magazine for parents with children who have special needs.*

*Key Words: News and Views, Children with special needs, blind, visually impaired*

Parenting Special Needs is an online magazine for parents who have children with special needs. Chantai Snellgrove, the founder and Editorial Director began this magazine after having a child with special needs. The magazine's mission is to provide families with information and inspiration. The magazine is not disability specific and has basic information on lots of topics.

Some of the features include: "REAL LIFE" with a special needs child, S.O.S: Siblings Offering Support, "Practical Tips", Do you know or Did you know?, Development, Special Needs Planning, Rights, Caregiver Care, information and resources.

The link to Parenting Special Needs on line magazine: [parentingspecialneeds.org](http://parentingspecialneeds.org)

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

### TEXAS FELLOWS

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters

Bring a Fella' to the Dance-



Recruit a VI Professional

#### Texas Fellow

Kathy Britsch

Tammy Averitt

Susan Butler

Mari Garza

Mari Garza

Vanamala Manohar

Tricia Lee

Tammy Henderson

Cynthia Carter

Janelle Felmet

Loretta Rockwell

Brenda Lee

Hillary Keyes

Bob Cope

Edwina Wilks

#### Candidate

Cindy Woolls

Pamela Thomas

Tracie Schiwart

Susan Little

Jodi Harris DeLeon

De Anne Arledge

Ashlei Humpert

Shannah Blankenship

Lenon Phillips

Jerry Mullins

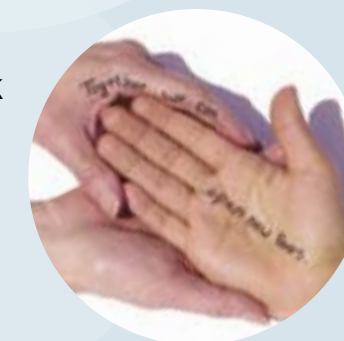
Jeffrey Greer

Roxanne Light

Vickie Korenek

Donna O'Brien

Elizabeth Watt



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

# Bulletin Board

## Announcements/Regional, State, National Training and Events

Mail or email your items for the Bulletin Board to Beth Bible:  
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756; or [bethbible@tsbvi.edu](mailto:bethbible@tsbvi.edu).  
A link to an up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar can be found at  
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/workshops>

## TSBVI Outreach Sponsored or Co-Sponsored Training Events

Outreach Programs sponsors and co-sponsors a variety of workshops and conferences throughout the year. Many of these take place on the campus of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Others take place in various locations throughout the state.

Collaboration in providing training events is a big part of our mission. We work with professional organizations, education service centers, and family support groups to offer conferences and larger statewide workshops.

You may wish to download the  
**2013-14 Outreach Catalog of Services and Supports**  
to have a listing of all our events. A link to the catalog can be found at:

[www.tsbvi.edu/workshops](http://www.tsbvi.edu/workshops)

## Statewide Calendar of Training Events

Want to know about all the training events going on this next year?

TSBVI Outreach maintains a  
**Statewide Calendar of Training Events**  
for the Statewide Leadership Services for Blind & Visually Impaired Network.

You can learn about events sponsored by the education service centers, parent organizations and others by following the link to the calendar at:

[www.tsbvi.edu/workshops](http://www.tsbvi.edu/workshops)

## Short-Term Programs at TSBVI

### Texas School for the Blind and Visually impaired

Short-Term Programs provide short-term services to visually impaired students who attend their local districts during the school year. Short-Term Programs provide two types of service:

**School Year Short-Term Programs:** range from three to five days in length and offer intensive, individual, narrowly focused training to academic students who are on or close to grade level in any area specifically related to vision loss, such as adaptive technology, Braille & Nemeth Code, and tactile math tools in relation to the Expanded Core Curriculum. Close collaboration with independent school districts occurs before and after participation in these programs. Instruction supports the regular curriculum (TEKS) by teaching:

- Disability-specific skills needed to access the regular curriculum (e.g., technology, low vision tools and strategies, math tools and strategies)
- Basic concepts that support the curriculum (e.g., college prep, social studies, research, number concepts)
- Attitudinal changes that support successful learning (e.g., self-determination, social skills, independent living)

**Summer Short-Term Programs:** provide a wide range of offerings, from elementary to high school, academic to severely multiply-impaired, in a broad array of content areas such as vocational, functional application of academic skills, independent living skills, social-emotional development, and adapted athletics.

If you would like more information about Short-Term Programs, please contact:

Dr. Lauren Newton, Principal of Short-term Programs  
(512) 206-9119  
[newtonl@tsbvi.edu](mailto:newtonl@tsbvi.edu)

[www.tsbvi.edu/school/about-tsbvi/190-special-programs](http://www.tsbvi.edu/school/about-tsbvi/190-special-programs)

## Blindness and Low-Vision Resources on the Internet

The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)  
Division for Blind Services (DBS)  
provides links to websites about what the different organizations or companies offer,  
for your information, to enable you to read and let you make your own decisions.

Find the list of links at:  
[www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/links.shtml](http://www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/links.shtml)

# TX SenseAbilities

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

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

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

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The audio version of *TX SenseAbilities* is provided by Learning Ally, Austin, TX.



This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education. Federal funds are administered through the Texas Education Agency to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.