

# TX SenseAbilities

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*Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired’s middle school robotics team won a Champions Award. Read how a rookie robotics team worked together to design and program Lego robots and won a local competition. The story starts in “Programming” on page 17.*

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

# My Experiences: The Good, the Bad, and the Ways of Interpreters

Quinn Burch, University Student, New York

*Editor's Note: The following is the second installment of a three part series. This article was written by Quinn Burch, a talented and inspirational college student with deafblindness, who was one of the self-advocates invited to present at the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) Symposium this past July. The NFADB Symposium was designed to be an initial step towards partnering with other national entities to effectively advocate for a continuum of individualized supports for people with deafblindness. Quinn's article focuses on qualified Interpreters for individuals who are deafblind. In the Fall 2012 edition, Vivicca Hartman shared about intervener services and in the Spring 2013 edition, we plan on featuring an article about Support Service Providers. To learn more about NFADB and the national organization's initiatives, please visit [www.NFADB.org](http://www.NFADB.org).*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, national systems improvement, individualized supports, qualified interpreters for the deafblind.*

Due to the fact that I have been deaf-blind since a very young age, I have grown accustomed to developing and maintaining close relationships with interpreters. They have become a significant part of my educational career. I'm going to share my experiences with you, the good and the bad experiences I've had with interpreters and the qualities in interpreters which have helped me the most in my academic career up to the present.

The most important thing for me, of course, is that an interpreter always, always, always has on black. If not black, a really dark color top. It also helps me if it is a modest cut, not low cut, or if the interpreter is wearing a dark colored scarf. When there is too much light skin, this gets in the way of the solid dark color background, which hampers my seeing their hands, and therefore their signing.

Due to lack of vision, I cannot see far, so I need an interpreter to be very close. A good interpreter friend of mine has joked: "You want me on your lap?" That's how close I need the interpreter to be. It may not be comfortable for some, but it's what it has to be. I do use some tactile sign, but I'm not proficient and have a hard time reading tactile signing. My vision requires that an interpreter keep their signing in an exact location so I can see their hands, which is about chin height and also does not impede my seeing the movement of their mouth, preferably higher up in front of the upper body but not too high, I need the background of the dark colored clothes to be able to see the signing. Without good contrast I have a hard time seeing the hands which is my way of getting the information I need.

I grew up in a hearing culture signing mostly Signed Exact English, this is what we signed at home. At school it was Contact Signing or more pidgin. This is a form of sign that is a little of American Sign Language (ASL) but more in the English word order, so I'm unfamiliar with the language of pure ASL.

Some interpreters are so used to interpreting in ASL, I'm a tough client because I need them to interpret in Signed Exact English. I'm also very different from most deaf clients because I know most interpreters are used to translating ASL to English when voicing something for a deaf person. When interpreters voice for me for the first time without knowing anything about me beforehand they are often caught off guard because I do not sign or think in ASL. I use many expressions and idioms that most deaf people are not familiar or comfortable with, such as "in one ear, out the other". Because I'm the only deaf person in my family, went to public schools and was mainstreamed, I haven't been exposed to much ASL at all. I am an avid reader, and that helps to contribute to my "thinking like a hearing person" as an interpreter friend of mine puts it. I'm not trying to be boastful; it's true for everyone who is a strong reader: strong readers have strong minds, and are usually very good writers too.

I've had some bad experiences with interpreters refusing or being unable to switch from ASL to English when interpreting for me, or in some other way being unable to adapt their style to my needs. For example there is one interpreter at a camp for blind young athletes where I coach. She's a nice woman, but she persisted in slouching when she interpreted, so it seems as though she is interpreting for her lap. I tried a few times to ask her to straighten up so I could see her hands, but to no avail.

Another woman I had in college persisted in using ASL, however, I continued to ask her to sign in English. She used certain ASL signs which are especially hard for me to see. Another interpreter friend tried to help me out and explain my problems to this woman, but she continued to sign her way.

I know this isn't something interpreters can help sometimes, but physical stature plays a major role in my ability to work well with an interpreter. I work better with a person who is slim because that way we can sit closer together and this helps me to see their hands easier. Also height matters. I have one interpreter at school who is REALLY short, and I was a little nervous when I found out she would be interpreting a walking tour of a college for me. I would have a hard time seeing her sign because I would have to look down to see her hands. I work better with a person who's my height or taller, at least if we are standing.

From the time I was in kindergarten, to my high school graduation in 2009 I had the same interpreter. She was more than just an interpreter, though. She was a mix of interpreter, aide, mentor, and friend. She interpreted my classes, but she also did other things to help me, such as making sure I had my work in Braille or in another accessible format. In math classes she wrote the problems on a whiteboard for me because I couldn't see the blackboard the teacher was writing on. She was always there for me, if I needed anything. If I didn't know where to go I knew I was always welcome in her office. We even hung out outside of school, going on trips, such as shopping. I stayed with her when my parents were in Boston for several weeks when Dad was getting treatment for his cancer. She's one of my biggest advocates, and I'd say she's a surrogate mother, we end our text messaging conversations the same way my mom and I do: "xoxoxox."

The sad thing is, once I graduated from high school my golden years with Mrs. Masick had to end. I really wanted her to go to college and interpret for me there, but she's not a college interpreter. My time with Mrs. Masick had to end. I was so scared. I'd been depending on her for a lot for the longest time, and I didn't know what I would do without her. It has been hard without her. The director of the students with disabilities office at my college does not know how to do her job, and always has a bee in her bonnet. I really believe I would have had a far less stressful and far smoother college career so far if Pam Masick Lane were still with me, or at least if she took a new job as the director of academic support at St. Rose!!! That's where I'm at school now.

So now it's a new arrangement. The college uses independent interpreter services. The college and the commission for the blind share the price for the interpreting services. Standard procedure, if I need an interpreter, is to email the head of the office for students with disabilities, and she contacts the head of the interpreter agencies so that interpreters can be booked for the time I requested. My first two years of school I was working with an interpreting agency headed by a woman who was strict and unfriendly, and often did not listen to what I had to say. She was coldly professional about rules, procedures, and what not. I was very unhappy because she didn't make an effort to schedule my preferred interpreters, and I was missing a lot of information because I didn't work well with most of the people she booked for me. I launched a campaign to switch to a different agency. I worked with this agency a little back then, but only for services that were not academic. I finally succeeded in getting the powers above to listen to me, and we got the switch. I've been a lot happier since then. The head of the new agency I work with is the complete opposite of the first head I worked with. She's friendly, energetic, bubbly, and chatty. She is willing to listen to what I have to say and listen to my suggestions. Most important, she makes an effort to see if my preferred interpreters are available to book them, and not booking new people I've never met before unless it's a last resort, and checking to make sure the arrangement is to my satisfaction. She's awesome. Thanks to her, I've been working with my favorite interpreters a lot more in the past couple years and am much happier.



*A photo of the author with an interpreter*

# Meaningful Gift-Giving

Kathie Snow, parent, native Texan living in Colorado

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*Abstract: A parent of a child with disabilities recommends meaningful gift ideas for families raising a child with disabilities.*

*Keywords: family wisdom, gift-giving, disability, self-care*

Ahhh, the joy of sharing during wonderful gift-giving times: holidays, birthdays, and more! What's on your shopping list? Toys, clothes, electronics, books, DVDs, or...? Your friends and loved ones will be happy with the gifts you give. Did you know you can give even more without spending a penny? Check out the following avenues for meaningful gift-giving:

**Parents:** Give your child's teacher Permission to Fail. Most educators try diligently to do their best. But teachers in inclusive classrooms may be unsure of themselves as they learn new strategies to include and support children with disabilities. In addition, they may often feel an extreme amount of pressure to do things perfectly. As the parent of a child with a disability, I learned many years ago that what worked with my son at one time, or in a particular environment, didn't always work the way I thought it would at other times or in other environments. My husband and I frequently need to try new things at home, knowing we'll make mistakes. We need to give educators (and anyone else who works with our children) the same Permission to Fail that we give ourselves. When parents let educators (and others) know it's okay to make mistakes, so long as they're willing to keep trying new things and do whatever it takes to be successful, educators can relax and do a better job. So with kind eyes, a warm smile, and a gentle touch on the hand or shoulder, say something like, "I'm not a perfect parent, and I don't expect you to be a perfect teacher. It's okay if you make mistakes, and I support your efforts as you try new things. Let's keep working together and help each other figure out the best ways to ensure both you and my child are successful and feel good about everything!"

**Educators:** Give mothers and fathers the gift of Respect for Parental Expertise. Parents of children with disabilities have years of experience—*they are experts!* Recognize that combining your professional expertise with parents' intimate knowledge of their child will result in success for you and the student.

**Parents and Educators:** Give children with disabilities the gift of Responsibility. When we expect children to be responsible, they know we trust them and believe in them. Being responsible can take many forms, such as: doing chores at home, making their own decisions (small and large), actively participating in their IEP meetings (including writing goals), finding their own jobs, and...the list is endless! When we *expect* a child to be more responsible, we send the message that we believe she's competent and able, and then *she* will believe she's competent and able. This is a gift that can

change a child's life, now and in the future!

**Parents:** Give your child a Vacation to Kidland. The daily routines of too many children with disabilities are governed by disability-related services. Many don't have time to be kids! So give your precious son or daughter a two-week break (or more) from home visits, speech/physical/occupational therapies, and other special services. Let him choose what to do with the hours in Kidland: sleep, watch a DVD, play with friends, do nothing, sit for hours playing a computer game, or spend dynamite time with mom and dad. Grown-ups take two week vacations from work. Why shouldn't kids get a vacation from the work of therapies and special services? Think how you and other family members will enjoy this vacation, too! (And, who knows, you might just decide to extend the vacation indefinitely!)

**Children and Adults with Disabilities:** Give someone the gift of Friendship. Too many people with disabilities are seen primarily as recipients of help and assistance, and they're surrounded by professionals and paid staff. But people with disabilities—just like people without disabilities—need friends and companions, and they need to be “givers,” not just “recipients.” Someone in your community needs your friendship and support! And the best way to “get a friend” is to “be a friend.” So make connections through church, community groups, or volunteer organizations, and find that person who needs you for a friend. When you give the gift of friendship, you give yourself a gift at the same time!

**Moms and Dads of Children with Disabilities:** Give yourself the gift of Serenity. Many parents are on the never-ending merry-go-round of services, IEPs, therapy goals, interventions, and more. When all this “disability business” is combined with being a wife/husband, having a job, and parenting all your children, disaster is in the making. Perpetual stress, exhaustion, and burn-out can create chaos in our lives, as well as in the lives of our loved ones. Everyone loses! Resolve to live a more peaceful, calm, serene life—be good to yourself and those you love. You don't have to “do it all!” What can you stop doing? What can you let go of? Parents around the country are discovering that cutting back on “disability business” has enabled them to rediscover a “normal” life. On a regular basis, ask yourself, “Will this (therapy, services, or whatever) really matter six months, one year, or five years from now?” We're often so caught up in the daily grind that we fail to look at the long-term outcomes. Do whatever it takes to simplify your life so you can enjoy time for yourself, and with your precious children and sweetheart.

Make Simplicity part of your daily life, in all areas—not just disability issues. Clear out the clutter in your house, your car, your life. Say “no” more often, so you don't overextend yourself or your children. Turn off the TV. Play a game with your family one night each week. Play some music and dance together. Cook together, then clean up together. Read a book together. Let everyone pile in one bed and cuddle together!

Give the gifts that truly matter—meaningful gifts from your heart and soul.

## DBMAT Family Weekend at Camp John Marc

Heather Withrow, parent, Austin, Texas

Article and Photography printed with permission from Heather's blog, *A Mom's Musings* at <http://hexwit.blogspot.com/>

*Abstract: A parent shares her family's first experience being part of the DBMAT Family Conference*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, family organization, deafblind, weekend retreat, sibling issues*

We went on a special trip up to Camp John Marc just east of Meridian, Texas. It was the 39th Annual DBMAT Family Conference. DBMAT is the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas. We were originally on the wait-list since the number of children was at maximum. Surprisingly room opened up for more children. Since our kids could go, we all went as a family. Once we got off I-35 near Waco onto the 70 mile per hour two-lane roads, it was a gorgeous drive all the way to Camp John Marc. The landscape reminded me so much of eastern Washington. The campground and facilities were so nice, expansive, the designs and details were delightfully well thought-out. It offered a lot of space for activities including workshop spaces and some of Skyler's weekend favorites- fishing, rock climbing and riding a zip line. Camp John Marc is designed for children with chronic illnesses and/or physical disabilities and is named after a young boy who passed away years ago from cancer. What is also impressive is the number of people and the time they invested to bring this camp to life and continue to develop it over the years.



*Cabins at Camp John Marc*

The new faces we met were parents of deafblind children and their siblings and there was a sprinkling of familiar faces with the presence of Orion's D/HH (teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing) teacher, Orion's brand new orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist and Linda Mamer from Vancouver, British

Columbia, Canada. Thomas and I had the pleasure of meeting Linda when she came to the Connections Beyond Sight and Sound (CBSS) workshop at U of Maryland in June 2011 for an inspiring week-long DB workshop.

We heard presentations from other parents of deafblind children who have a lot of mileage under their belt on the road ahead of us. Just like we read on the Internet or learned elsewhere, at the workshop we continued to hear parent testimonies of the positive outcomes of interveners working with their children. You can read about the experience of one family continuing to raise funds to pay for interveners to come and work with their daughter Lauren again here:  
<http://www.helplaurenlearn.net/>.

(Yes, in deafblind-savvy educational programs, interveners are an expected sight. Also, there is no age too young to have an intervener benefit the deafblind child and his/her family. Yes, that means Orion would benefit from one already.)

Professionals presented on very interesting topics: Linda Mamer presented about community involvement, keeping an eye open for employment opportunities for our DB children and using iPad apps for deafblind children. With the iPad apps, I can think of many children who would benefit from the list Linda created. Her "Early Learning Apps for iPad" list can be found and downloaded from <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/emergent-literacy-general-literacy-multiple-disabilitiescontent/technology/ipad-ipod-iphone-%E2%80%93>

Linda also pointed out that there is no magical time to start learning and using sign language with our deafblind children. It's hard to start, yes, but once you've started it seems less challenging. She recommended starting with ten signs; they have to be the right signs (perhaps practical signs that are used often). Thomas and I are in a unique situation; since it is widespread that parents of deafblind children are hearing, the language of the conference was spoken English. We had interpreters present. Skyler had a couple signing staff in his "cabin" group. As the hours went by through the weekend, we were able to observe parents signing, whether it was with us or others. Signing is not the only mode of communication available but it is one of the many options that should readily be available to your child, deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind. My point in sharing this is it's not too late and you don't need to know hundreds of signs when you start tactile signing with your deafblind child.

Fran LaWare and David Wiley from Texas Deafblind Outreach presented on helping students with deafblindness and challenging behavior. One of my favorite new lenses (perspectives) is "Are we asking the wrong question?" From their presentation preventing problems is better than reacting to them. An example from their presentation (perhaps here in my blog skewed over time in my mind) of preventing problems was to eliminate the tendency of a child to stop right outside the cafeteria when he/she was supposed to continue along the path to another building for a different activity way before lunch. Suggestions are to give the child a snack before transitioning, or take the long way around avoiding the cafeteria.

From a representative from Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), we learned of state resources such as waivers and one was the Deafblind with Multiple Disabilities (DBMD) waiver that would cover the cost of services (offered are physical therapy, occupational therapy, adaptive aids, intervener services, respite, nursing or home based care, etc.) for kids like Orion once they get off the top of the interest list. There are eligibility criteria for several different waivers that I'm not going to get into now. Kids can spend years and years on the list before their turn happens. It also depends on the availability of government funds. Only recently, deafblind individuals could not receive DBMD waiver funds until they became 18 years old. Now it's open to deafblind people of all ages here in Texas.

That was enlightening, and there was entertainment (not counting meeting other parents and kids) with the silent auction, live auction and the ice cream social. I won some items from the silent auction (my first Scentsy 'candle' light with scented wax!), and had some fun at the ice cream social. Orion had fun feeling the loud music on the table; people were thumping their hands on the table along with the beats. It was a real fun family-of-deafblind-children environment: parents, deafblind children, their brothers and sisters, plenty of camp volunteers. Orion was just one of the kids. What was common was that everyone was enjoying themselves with frequent flashes of happy faces and curious hands.



*A photo of the author's son at DBMAT*

I opted out of the live auction but with the quick look I got, people were laughing and the auctioneers seemed to have so much fun. Next year, I have to make sure I pack in some more oomph (energy)

to go.

Skyler and Anastasia spent the daytime with their cabin groups according to age. Skyler turned eight years old on Saturday, October 13! (We had a birthday party with friends the previous weekend.) I would think this is one fabulous birthday weekend with the many things Skyler was able to do! Skyler said he caught a fish from the lake. We wish we saw it but understand a picture was taken. Also, a wasp inappropriately gave Skyler a birthday greeting in the form of a sting on his left calf. His first wasp sting! Anastasia begged and begged on Saturday night to stay in the cabin with the other kids whose parents signed them up for kids' camp, so we let her join them. (Parents can have kids sleep with them in their cabins or to stay the weekend with their friends in the kids' camp.)

Orion, since he's two years old (nearly 27 months to be exact), spent the day at the infirmary designated for infants to three year olds with plenty of volunteers and a nurse around. I was not the only parent who brought plenty of toys and a seat for our kid. He lay on his blanket, played with the toys, went for rides on his Swifty stroller, was fed, changed, etc.

On Sunday after lunch, we took the back roads, avoiding I-35, back to Austin. I kept telling Thomas the landscape was so beautiful as we drove over slight rolling hills. The ground was greener than I thought. I appreciate being able to drive at 70 miles per hour, legally!

Thomas and I appreciated presentations, learning more about the resources available and the opportunity to meet other parents and we look forward to meeting more next year. That's right, we'll be back next year!



*A photo of big hairy spiders at Camp John Marc*

## Texas Chargers Seventh Annual Retreat and Conference

Debika Ingham, Texas Chargers treasurer and parent of a child with CHARGE, Austin, TX

*Abstract: The author reflects upon the growth of the annual Texas Chargers Family Retreat and Conference, which celebrated their seventh year of coming together.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, Charge Syndrome, Texas Chargers, family retreat*

Texas Chargers, Inc. is a group of Texas families, friends and professionals dedicated to helping children and young adults living with CHARGE Syndrome. Our two key goals are to provide an annual retreat to help families access the information and resources specific to the state of Texas and to support the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation in every way possible.

Texas Chargers held our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual retreat and conference in Navasota, Texas on the first weekend in November (aka opening weekend for deer hunting.) Early on, we had concerns about this and other conflicts families might face in attending this retreat especially since our lives only seem to get steadily more busy and complicated. Our concerns melted away when we had almost 50 families, 50 volunteers and many professionals and friends descend upon Camp Allen. Everybody was ready to share, learn and celebrate.

Not only did we marvel at how our attendance grew considerably from last year, we all marveled at the amount of change our group has undergone. At the group photo, we had individuals with CHARGE who had just been born to some who are entering their transition years and several beyond. Each individual's journey was marked with different challenges and successes. Whether the family was just entering this crazy yet often beautiful existence, or saying or signing the first few words, or moving out of a chair and into a walker, or moving out of a walker and taking their first steps, or eating a few bites on top of being gastric tube fed, or working towards an Acceptance, Review or Dismissal (ARD) meeting, or attending high school, or living independently....each family and each individual showed tremendous resolve to make the best life possible for themselves.



*A group photo of all the individuals with CHARGE Syndrome in attendance.*

Our weekend began with a group dinner and a casual meet and greet with our guest speaker, David Brown. This was my first time meeting him and the group had been buzzing about how amazing it was to have him in our presence, so I was a little uneasy about meeting such an expert on Deafblindness and CHARGE Syndrome. When I finally did watch him interact with the families, I was so impressed with how easy he is with both his conversation and with his intuitive observations of the people we were there to honor. He was either lost in conversation with the families or lost in the world of observation and interaction with the individuals with CHARGE.

As much as Texas Chargers pride ourselves on bringing in amazing experts and champions of those with CHARGE Syndrome as our keynote speakers, David was very quick to stress that he doesn't see himself as an "expert" but rather as "experienced" with CHARGE. He came to us from the California Deaf-Blind Project, and since the beginning of his career in education has been working with deafblindness and CHARGE. He emphasized that CHARGE Syndrome has a few patterns or characteristics that bind, but the spectrum of behavior, capabilities, challenges, and considerations are dizzying. For example:

- The original set of six anomalies that were formerly used to define CHARGE Syndrome has now risen to almost 40 and there are possibly more
- CHARGE Syndrome is a true multi-sensory impairment (vision, hearing, taste, smell, balance, temperature, pain, pressure) effecting communication, learning, development and behavior
- These impairments are often coupled with pervasive issues with swallowing, breathing, eating, drinking and digestion and other fundamental body processes
- While individuals with CHARGE show an incredible resolve to face or overcome these obstacles, almost every action and decision is a battle filled with stress

David then shared some frameworks on how to approach and provide solutions to behavior, learning, communication and development from a multi-sensory point of view. During a question and answer session later in the day, these considerations were used to discuss several behavior and communications issues that families posed. He made it fun for the group by using the framework he shared about the hierarchy of arousal (from deep sleep to uncontrolled agitation) and observations of how we handled ourselves in the room as the talk progressed and our coping strategies... from wiggling in our chairs, to standing, to getting coffee. If this is how people deal with an hour long talk, imagine how those with multi-sensory impairment have to deal with just about everything in their lives!

While families enjoyed time with David Brown and with one another during various support groups and informational sessions, the children with CHARGE and their siblings were enjoying a variety of activities with the help of an army of generous and energized volunteers. Regardless of their age or ability, we kept them busy with crafts, games, animals, movies, and time to socialize. One of the highlights of every conference is the social on Saturday night where families relax, visit, and dance. We also held another successful silent auction and raffle with many items being donated or made by the families themselves.



*Camp Allen provided a scenic backdrop for play, exploration, and friendship*

Providing support and resources is another important facet of our mission and we do that during the retreat through a variety of support groups and special informational sessions. As always, the moms, dads, siblings, and grandparents of those with CHARGE met to share and connect. It was good to have the presence of members from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), the various Educational Service Centers (ESC) of Texas, the DARS (Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services) Division for Blind Services and the DARS Office for the Deaf and Hard and Hearing supporting us with outreach and information, financial assistance, and many of them attend the retreat and conference, too! Their presence helps to keep a pulse on the families and help ensure the families are knowledgeable of not only what resources are available, but how to obtain them. A board member provided a session specifically geared towards transition and considerations of older individuals with CHARGE and how to provide a very person centered approach to growing their independence, decision making, and individuality. Financial and trust considerations were also discussed.

Each year, we celebrate a special Charger by awarding the “Star Charger” award to individuals with CHARGE. The Star Charger provides us with a presentation of their life with CHARGE and ways for us to view the world through their eyes. They encourage us with their communication styles (often multimedia and often working with friends and families to put it all together), self-advocacy, and an incredible spirit. This year, Robert Kocian signed, joked, and shared his way through an incredible presentation that left us all inspired. It’s the highlight of many of our weekends because it’s the very essence of why we get together: to share and celebrate the unique life of someone living with CHARGE.

As a final gesture for the weekend, the board provided copies of Tim Hartshorne’s excellent text, *CHARGE Syndrome*, to all of the attendees. The book has been on almost everyone’s reading wish list for a while, and we hope this definitive resource serves everyone well in learning more about various aspects of CHARGE. This was a tremendous gift we were able to provide our attending

members as we've had some great success building our organization over the last couple of years. The group has come a long way from its humble beginnings but knows there are always more opportunities and better ways to meet our mission and to support those with CHARGE Syndrome. We welcome you to our website to learn more, read presentations, and be in touch with board members and the member families.



*Kids with CHARGE and their families enjoyed the Texas Chargers retreat*

We are excited to announce that next year's retreat will be held in Navasota, Texas at Camp Allen. Not only are the grounds, the rooms, the service and facilities all wonderful, we have all become acquainted with how to pull off a great weekend with the support staff as planned by our program committee. It also serves as a fairly central location for the majority of the families within Texas who attend. The board has made a strong effort in the last year to look at longer term planning and ways to further assist families throughout Texas that have been and will be diagnosed with CHARGE. The biannual International CHARGE Syndrome Conference will be held this year in Scottsdale, Arizona and the 2013 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness is also coming in February. We are very excited to continue learning and sharing within both the deafblind and CHARGE communities. Into the New Year we go!

Thanks to all of you in the deafblind community for providing support to our members. We at Texas Chargers hope you and yours enjoyed the holidays and remember to celebrate the best "present" of all – each and every day we have together in this journey called life.

## TAPVI Talks

Jean Robinson, TSBVI Outreach, TAPVI Advisor

*Abstract: The Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) will co-host a family event on Saturday, April 13, 2013 in Edinburg, Texas. The national organization NAPVI announces new affiliation with the Jewish Guild.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, family organizations, visual impairments, TAPVI, NAPVI*

**Save the date** of Saturday, April 13, 2013 for an event for your entire family. In collaboration with Region 1 ESC, DBS and TSBVI Outreach, TAPVI is sponsoring a hands-on workshop and networking opportunity for families in the Edinburg, Texas area. The topic is Developing Recreation and Leisure skills, which is part of the Expanded Core Curriculum for students with visual impairments. Joe Paschall, Adaptive Physical Education (APE) instructor at TSBVI will be in Region 1 to present to area APE teachers the day before. Joe has agreed to stay over so family members can learn how to include their child with a visual impairment in activities with sighted children. The local APE teachers and other vision professionals are invited to provide additional support to the families. The location will be announced. Don't miss this chance to meet other families and have a family fun day. There will be games, prizes and snacks! Look for details to be posted on the TSBVI website. Contact TAPVI President, Isela Wilson at [iselawilson@yahoo.com](mailto:iselawilson@yahoo.com) or 956-778-1142 for more information.

**There's a membership push** to join TAPVI. With the decision to lower annual dues to \$10. Several members participated in White Cane Day in October 2012 to promote awareness of people with visual impairments. Information about TAPVI was shared at White Cane Day and the TSBVI Parent Weekend in Austin and at the Babies' Day Out at Region 10 ESC in the Dallas area. If you are interested in joining TAPVI, an application can be downloaded in English at:

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/images/outreach/tapv.doc>

and in Spanish at: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/images/outreach/tapvi-span.doc>.

Also you can contact our treasurer and database chair, Linda Hulett at [lhulett9804@yahoo.com](mailto:lhulett9804@yahoo.com).

Remember TAPVI has a PayPal account as well.

**TAPVI has its own website!** This was possible by participating in the Accessible Internet Rally (AIR) web design completion sponsored by Knowbility. Knowbility is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support the accessibility and use of technology by individuals with disabilities. This contest matches nonprofits with professional web developers to create websites. The professionals learn how to make a website accessible and the nonprofit gets a professional website built at a minimum cost. The unveiling will be in March 2013.

Please read this announcement from our national organization's Executive Director Susan Laventure:

**Dear NAPVI Members and Friends,**

We are proud to announce that our organization, the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI), has formally merged with the Jewish Guild Healthcare located in New York City as one of its subsidiaries. NAPVI will continue its core mission since we were established as a non-profit, national membership organization in 1980, to help parents to find information and locate resources for their children who are blind or visually impaired and who may have additional disabilities and advocate on a national level for the resources necessary to educate our children.

While NAPVI will continue to retain its identity, including NAPVI's parent Board of Directors, membership and State Affiliate Parents' Associations, joining the Jewish Guild is a good fit for us to help expand our core mission and will open new doors within the medical and health arenas to reach more families. We intend on strategically advocating within the medical community to promote healthcare professionals to give referrals to specialized early intervention vision services and resources for children who are newly diagnosed as blind or visually impaired, including children with multiple disabilities.

Since its founding in 1914, the mission of the Jewish Guild has been to help those with vision loss live with independence and dignity. The Guild is a not-for-profit, non-sectarian agency that serves persons of all ages who are visually impaired, blind and with multiple disabilities. The Guild provides a wide range of programs and services that include clinical services, low vision rehabilitation, adult day health care, mental health services, education, and programs for individuals with developmental disabilities. They also offer health plans, which provide, manage and coordinate healthcare services so that people with long term care and other special needs can live safely at home.

One of the many programs at the Jewish Guild that NAPVI will be working closely with is the Children's Vision Health Initiative. This program conducts national telephone support groups for parents based on the eye condition of their child. At the request of parents, the Guild will soon be starting a new group for the sighted siblings of children who are blind and visually impaired. Intended for pre-teens and teens the group will be facilitated by a clinical psychologist at the Guild, Dr. Susan Barron, and will deal with issues that parents have identified as concerns. These include the fact that siblings of a blind child often receive less parent time and attention and can become frustrated and angry. Any NAPVI parent wanting their sighted child to participate in this group can contact Dan Callahan at 800-915-0306 for more information.

**NAPVI's 2012 National Family Conference** was held this year in Newton, MA. Over 400 parents and children from 30 states and four countries (Germany, the UK, Philippines and Canada) participated. The conference was so successful we are planning the next National Family Conference to be held July 19-21, 2013 at the same location. NAPVI is excited to enter this new stage of development which will allow us to reach more families to help them get connect with the resources and supports they need.

## Middle School Robotics Team Wins Champions Award

Kay Pruett, braille teacher, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: Students at TSBVI compete and win in a Lego robotics tournament*

*Keywords: robotics, Lego, visually Impaired, champion*

The rookie robotics team from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), is called the Dot Bots, and made up of Jonathan Alcaraz, Tyler Chambliss, Chandler Caveny, Davieon Perez, and Ryan Trevino. The Dot Bots wowed the judges in its qualifying tournament of the *FIRST* Lego League (FLL) on December 1, 2012, at Connolly High School in Pflugerville, Texas. Twenty-four teams vied for ten awards and a "golden ticket" to advance to the Central Texas Invitational Tournament. Competing against 23 teams of sighted students, the Dot Bots performed so well in all areas that they not only won a golden ticket to the Central Texas Invitational Tournament at Westlake High School, but they tied with last year's Central Texas Invitational Champions to win one of two Champions Awards.



*The Dot Bots, their robot, and their sponsors.*

It is rare for a first year rookie team to earn a Champions Award because it requires strong performance in all three competition areas: the robot game, the research project, and core values which includes team work and professionalism. No one at the meet expected a visually impaired rookie team to manage it. We are very proud of what the Dot Bots have achieved. They have shown the robotics community that visual impairment does not limit the work an individual can do.

Participating in an FLL team brings our students many benefits:

- Working on interactions, communications, social skills and becoming a gracious professional in

every aspect of this highly motivational activity.

- Interacting with typical sighted students, both with other teams and with the LASA High School mentors who have worked with them.
- Measuring their abilities on a level playing field against sighted peers.
- Demonstrating to others how blind and visually impaired people can perform the tasks needed in the world of work.

Team members are also motivated to get extra practice in:

- Graphic and spatial interpretation through building and planning missions.
- Technological, mathematical and logical skills through planning and programming missions.
- Literacy skills through record keeping, research and presentation development.

TSBVI's robotics team began meeting this fall during the first week of school. Guided and supported by coaches, mentors and dorm staff they named themselves the Dot Bots and stepped into unknown territory to take on this year's FLL Topic of Senior Solutions. Senior Solutions invites 9-14 year-olds to consider the challenges of growing older. Teams research and develop real life solutions to help keep senior adults active, engaged and connected. Teams build and program an autonomous Lego "Mindstorms" robot to accomplish tasks that simulate a number of challenges that older adults face, such as maintaining hobbies, keeping up communication with family and friends, and negotiating stairs. Throughout the season, students practice FLL's Core Values including independence, teamwork and friendly competition.

The Dot Bots began their research project by choosing and interviewing three senior partners, adults from a local retirement community. Two of these seniors are facing vision loss and learning braille themselves. Our team identified with these seniors' difficulty shopping for groceries. They researched current solutions and possible technologies to envision and develop a solution. Their innovative grocery store navigation tool excited both their senior partners and the judges at their December tournament, leading to a good showing in the research project.

For the Robot Game, the team built and programmed a Lego robot to bring a broken chair model to a base, precisely place quilt square pieces to form a quilt square of four blocks, lift the flag on a communication screen and climb stairs to balance on a platform. They designed a way to align the robot against the corner of the playing field and practiced to improve the reliability of each mission. Each mission earned them points in the robot game. They also approached teams they were to compete against to discuss and plan for earning the joint points of a cooperation mission. Their hard work and careful alignment of the robot for each run earned them the tournament's sixth highest robot game score. They also performed well in their robot design presentation where they explained how and why they did the missions they selected.

Throughout the tournament day, the Dot Bots displayed their "Core Values" of inspiration, teamwork, and professionalism. Core Values were also judged in a special session, without coaches, where teams are given a difficult task requiring teamwork and coordination. The team managed to work through their struggles with the task. Team members describe how they are learning to "agree to disagree" and maintain their gracious professionalism toward each other and toward the other teams.

Core Values require that the students do all the work, guided by their mentors. Our team has been mentored and supported by an enthusiastic team: Co-coaches Dr. Kay Pruet (TSBVI braille and reading improvement teacher) and Gerry Cocco (volunteer software engineer); adult mentors Jim Allan (TSBVI technology mentor) and Jane Young (FLL volunteer mentor); TSBVI student mentor, Jose Ruiz; and residential staff including Amanda Storassli, Louis Broussard, Mike Alexander, Tammy Reed and Shelly Allen. LASA High School robotics team, National Instruments, *FIRST*® and a variety of individuals gave information and support to offer students this opportunity. Support was strong from the entire school, including the maintenance department which built one of the nicest game tables in existence.

After their amazing win the team regrouped, evaluated their performance, and made a commitment to one another to attempt to take their skills to a new level for the Invitational Tournament. They invited two new TSBVI students, David Ardondo and Destiny Perez, to join the team. The team of seven is now working hard to prepare for the Central Texas FLL Invitational Tournament at Westlake High School, on February 2, 2013. Go Dot Bots! We are proud of you!



*Johnathan and Chandler collaborate*

## **Disability Awareness Day at Texas School for the Deaf**

Peggy Miller, deafblind specialist, Texas School for the Deaf,  
Holly Cooper, deafblind specialist, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

*Abstract: Deaf students participate in activities designed to simulate a variety of disabilities*

*Keywords: disability, blindness, visual impairment, deaf students*

October is Disability Awareness Month, and in recognition of this, faculty and staff at the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) Special Needs Program planned, organized, and produced an exciting, challenging and educational Disability Awareness Fair. The event took place in a large gymnasium on campus which was set up with different booths, tents and areas with activities for students. Eight different areas were set up to allow students to experience some of the challenges of living with a disability.

Activities designed to help students understand the challenges of living with a visual impairment were offered in a variety of activities. There was an orientation and mobility station where students put on blindfolds and walked through an obstacle course. While they waited to go through the obstacle course, students learned about braille and got to practice writing their names in braille. They also read books and observed materials using magnifiers and other devices. They felt tactile maps and other graphics that are used by individuals who read braille. They also learned about tactile symbols which are used instead of picture symbols for communication and early literacy by individuals with visual impairment and additional disabilities.

In addition to the braille station and the O&M course, the Tactile House offered an opportunity to use senses other than sight to navigate through an unfamiliar place. Deaf students had to wear a blindfold and make their way through a maze of obstacles that included going over, under, and around things while constantly feeling different tactile sensations (rough, wet, smooth, slimy) and never being able to anticipate what was coming next, such as being sprayed with water.

Another booth contained interactive communication materials to show how people who aren't able to speak or sign can communicate. Three mystery boxes with items of different textures were presented to the students who then used a variety of communication devices to describe what was inside. The students used a picture symbol communication book, an iPad with voice output communication app, and a Dynavox voice output augmentative communication device. The iPad app was activated by touch and Dynavox was activated with a head pointer.

The sensory house was a big hit! In it students experienced sensory overload with blowing fans, fog and strobe lights. The students had to complete a task with lights flickering and people tapping on them, their table, and chairs. The sensory house was designed to simulate some of the sensory processing difficulties experienced by individuals with autism. While it was fun, it was overwhelming

for most students who went through it.

Planning and staging this special day involved a considerable amount of work from volunteers and professionals. A committee of staff members was formed by the Special Needs Department, which serves deaf students who have additional disabilities. Some theater set equipment was loaned for the day. Many student volunteers came from Serteen club in Round Rock, a teen affiliate of Sertoma. Sertoma is a service organization dedicated to causes related to deafness and hearing impairment. Disabled vets from Heros Night Out volunteered at booths. Most of the teens and veterans didn't know sign language or could sign only a limited amount. TSD staff members also volunteered during their breaks and other available time throughout the day.

Staff reported interesting discussion about disabilities with students after the event. An estimated 450 participated in the Disability Awareness Fair. Plans are underway to repeat the event with even more activities next year.



*Tactile symbol bingo at Texas School for the Deaf's Disability Awareness Day*

## Assistive Technology and the 1:1 Student

Andrew Marcinek, Instructional Technology Specialist, Boston Massachusetts  
Originally published in *Edutopia*, reprinted with permission

*Abstract: A student with changing vision finds many features of the iPad make text accessible*

*Keywords: visually impaired, audio books, Bookshare.*

Much has been said about the iPad being a revolutionary device for education. There are even education conferences that are dedicated to its use. About a year ago, after the death of Apple founder Steve Jobs, 60 Minutes ran a piece on how the iPad was being used as an assistive technology with autistic students (Sughrue, 2011). This piece was eye opening for many -- it showed the potential for this device as an assistive technology and how it can change learning for students with disabilities or impairments.

Meaghan Roper, a junior at Burlington High School, shares a similar story with the iPad. When Meaghan was six years old, she was diagnosed with a visual impairment. In the eighth grade, she started to notice a decline in her vision. She sought out surgery to repair or delay her vision decline, and while successful, the procedure did not hold for very long.

The following year, Meaghan entered Burlington High School as a freshman. It was decided that she would have a laptop coupled with assistive software programs to assist with her visual impairment. She read all of her books on this laptop and was able to use several features in Microsoft Word. She had her teachers' documents scanned and printed in large fonts. Meaghan also used an audio book reader for some of her classes. In short, she had to be aware and proficient in many technologies and applications to stay current with her studies in all of her classes. This all changed at the beginning of her sophomore year -- the year that Burlington High School launched their 1:1 iPad initiative (Marcinek, 2012).

### A Transformative Experience

Meaghan recalls her first moments with the iPad and how she and her liaison discovered the variety of new opportunities that this one device presented. One of the first things she used was the ability to invert the colors of the screen. The iPad gives users the opportunity to read predominantly black text on a lighter screen, or to invert the colors and overlay white text on a black screen. This one feature, Meaghan recalls, was "transformative" in her learning of what the iPad could offer her educational experience.

Aside from the color inversion, Meaghan utilizes the VoiceOver feature that will read any selected text on the screen, and the Zoom feature that requires a double-tap of three fingers.

Beyond the simple flip of a switch in the accessibility options, Meaghan soon found many new

opportunities for her learning on this one device. In the past, she would have to get all of her teachers' handouts enlarged and reprinted. Obviously, this was time consuming and took lots of paper. A typical one-page handout would on average become four to five large-print pages before Meaghan could work with it. With the iPad, she can take a screenshot of the PDF file her teachers embed on their websites or share through Google Drive or Dropbox, and simply pinch the screen to enlarge. She also uses the camera application to take pictures of teachers' notes or homework on the board so that she can pinch zoom to clearly see every letter. She says this approach is not only more efficient but has also helped her to organize her schoolwork more effectively. Plus, her schoolwork is viewable offline and is accessible on one device that's "much lighter than a laptop."

### **Apps for Every Need**

In Meaghan's day-to-day operation of the iPad, she uses several applications to manage her content. It doesn't take her too many apps to get through her school day. She's thankful that, along with transitioning to the iPad, Burlington also married the Google Apps for Education (Google) suite with this device. She finds ease in accessing Google Docs from multiple devices and knowing that her work will always be safe, secure and not dependent on a machine's functionality.

Any photo or screenshot she takes can be easily uploaded to the cloud through the Google Drive for iPad (Google) app. This eliminates the process of having to email a Word document to yourself, download it to a machine (that hopefully has a corresponding version of Word), and then edit . . . and then repeat this process for every document. With the Google Drive app and Google Apps for Education Suite (Google), Meaghan is able to move everything she needs seamlessly throughout her day without the cumbersome processes associated with Microsoft Office documents.

When Meaghan has to annotate a document and return the markup to a teacher, she will call on the free application Paperport Notes (formerly Noterize) (Nuance Communications). This application allows her to easily access documents from her teachers, download them to this app, organize them accordingly, annotate and submit for review. The whole process, she says, "has made me a more organized student," and she doesn't feel like she is lagging behind in any of her classes because of her vision.

For texts that are required reading for her classes, Meaghan uses an application called Read 2 Go (Benetech, 2012), which lets her download a single app and access a variety of books via Bookshare. She can listen to these books, controlling the visual enhancements, background colors and highlighting options as she reads along.

In Geometry, Meaghan finds ease in keeping up with a visual subject by using Join.me (LogMeIn, 2012). This app allows her Geometry teacher, Ms. Palmer, to share her projected computer screen directly onto Meaghan's iPad. Meaghan can pinch and zoom in realtime as Ms. Palmer presents material to the class on the SmartBoard. This application, Meaghan attests, "has really improved my experience in Geometry class. Geometry is a very visual subject, and having this app on my iPad has given me an opportunity to keep pace and see Geometry more clearly."

Overall, Meaghan regards the iPad as a transformative device in her learning experience. While many debate what device is best, or if any technology is really necessary, I ask you to reflect on what you just read. Meaghan's story is by no means limited. There are many students who benefit from assistive technology on a daily basis; however, some may never get to experience the iPad. I'm not writing this as a pitch for Apple, but simply stating that incorporating one thousand iPads at Burlington High School has transformed Meaghan Roper's learning experience. And that alone is reason enough to give thanks for this device in our school.

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# Find New Ways to Support Individualized Educational Programs in Texas

Author: Cyral Miller, Outreach Director, TSBVI

*Abstract: Outreach Programs and services are described, including the website, the distance learning portal, consultation visits, and theory-to-practice visits*

*Keywords: consultation, distance technical support, distance learning, visual impairment*

TSBVI Outreach has been piloting new techniques to help local districts educate their students with visual impairments. There are only 9000 students eligible for services as students with a visual impairment in the entire state of Texas. This relatively small population of students is spread across 1100 districts and includes a wide diversity in ages, abilities, presence of additional disabilities and other individual differences. Conducting appropriate evaluation, developing IEPs that address the Expanded Core Curriculum, connecting families for support, models for successful transition planning and other components of a quality program from birth to graduation for such a range of students can pose extreme challenges.

At each of the 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) there is a Visual Impairment consultant and a Deafblind Specialist who can provide assistance to districts within their region and this system serves many districts very well.

The complexity of this population, however, means that no individual consultant or teacher will be expert on all solutions to address the many implications of visual impairment and deafblindness. The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) established the Outreach Programs in 1990 as a statewide resource to students served in their home districts. Recently, we have been using new technology options to serve local districts more effectively. Some highlights include:

For general assistance:

- The *TSBVI website*, <http://www.tsbvi.edu>, publishes information from on campus and far beyond, and provides an ever changing resource available for any time, anywhere learning. There are articles from the TX SenseAbilities newsletter, <http://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-sensabilities>, publications available from the [curriculum department](http://www.tsbvi.edu/curriculum-a-publications), at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/curriculum-a-publications>  
[Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum](http://www.tsbvi.edu/REC2Web) at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/REC2Web>  
extensive sections on [math tools and strategies](http://www.tsbvi.edu/math) at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/math>  
blogs on [assistive technology](http://www.tsbvi.edu/blog/blogs-2) at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/blog/blogs-2>, and so much more.
- A new and growing *TSBVI distance learning site*, <http://distance.tsbvi.edu/>, offers videos, courses and links to resources on other websites. There are (accessible) video demonstrations of the instructional strategies cited in research and step-by-step guidance on

such topics as

[communication assessment](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/communication): <http://distance.tsbvi.edu/communication>

[assistive technology tools](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/nichols_ipad-voiceover.html): [http://distance.tsbvi.edu/nichols\\_ipad-voiceover.html](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/nichols_ipad-voiceover.html)

[adaptive math tools](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/osterhaus_math_intro.html): [http://distance.tsbvi.edu/osterhaus\\_math\\_intro.html](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/osterhaus_math_intro.html)

[video introductions to Texas' dynamic family organizations](http://distance.tsbvi.edu/): <http://distance.tsbvi.edu/>

- A joint website with Perkins School for the Blind, Paths to Literacy (<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/>) is now serving as an online home for research, teaching strategies, upcoming conferences, and extensive resources relating to literacy.

For more individual assistance:

- School consultations - Local visits from experienced professionals are available from the TSBVI Outreach Programs. These consultations are requested by the local school district online at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/3257-student-and-program-consultation>. This year, in tandem with the [National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness' Distance Mentoring Project](http://www.nationaldb.org/dbp/current.htm#gense), (<http://www.nationaldb.org/dbp/current.htm#gense>) TSBVI Outreach has been able to extend our support beyond these visits by linking with local districts via Adobe Connect webinars. We are exploring more ways to integrate web-based training into our local support options.
- In some cases, it is helpful to a district to focus on a type of educational practice that can be implemented with several students. A Theory to Practice training can include personal visits, web meetings, shared resources and other types of training. A Theory to Practice training can be requested online at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/3257-student-and-program-consultation>.

There are descriptions of all the programs and services available from the TSBVI Outreach Programs at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/3340-outreach-programs> and you can download a 2012-2013 Catalog at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach>.

TSBVI Outreach Programs continue to explore ways to reach across Texas to meet local needs. As technology has changed, exciting new options have become possible. We welcome your ideas! Please contact me at [millerc@tsbvi.edu](mailto:millerc@tsbvi.edu) or 512-206-9242 with questions, comments and/or suggestions.

## **“What she said...” “What he said....” Reflections from the Second Annual Bring Your Boss to Work Week**

KC Dignan, Ph.D., Statewide Professional Preparation Coordinator

*Abstract: teachers of students with visual impairment and their supervisors reflect on Bring Your Boss to Work Week*

*Keywords: visual impairment, teachers, administrators*

Asking your boss to spend time with you can be a risky task. It may require you to step out of your comfort zone. However, those who did it and shared their experiences with us had great things to say about the experience. Below (and in random order) are some of the comments I received, both from Texans and from VI professionals in other states.

What was the highlight of the experience for you?

- Getting to show off my student's math success
- I was proud to get to show my director how well a bright student was doing on learning braille and keyboarding. We had planned on seeing a student with CVI and multiple disabilities too, but she was sick. My director said we could make another appointment to see her sometime! The whole experience was very positive. Thank you for the whole idea!
- It was nice for my supervisor to be able to meet one of the students I work with.
- Sharing what I do.
- I appreciated that my administrator was so interested in the needs of this child and her family.
- Having my director experience the scope and organization of my job.
- Showing the extreme range of the types of students I work with.
- Watching my director engage with the students and taking direction or following my lead on what to do. It was great that Ms. [Smith] didn't just observe the whole time, but wanted to get involved and learning through hands-on experience.
- Discussing teaching methodology-- different student needs, awareness of literacy and braille issues.
- When Mr. [Jones] used a monocular under student guidance to read a student activity on the wall. Mr. [Jones] was able to experience 3 different types of students (1st grade academic MIVI, and 9th grade low vision, 5th grade braille reader). Personally, it was awesome sharing a portion of my day... sharing my life's passion.

We also asked administrators what they thought, if this was a good use of their time.

- Yes. It helped me to understand the challenges and successes of staff and students.
- Yes, this gave me an opportunity to compliment the great success of our VI staff.
- Excellent use of time! I learned so much!!

- It was very insightful. The complication of this disability continues to amaze me.
- Yes, it is always valuable to see our instructional process.
- Yes, the time provided insights into the complexities of abacus use and reading braille.
- Yes, excellent work by an excellent teacher.
- It was a good use of time since I could use it as an observation and see the amazing progress students make with good instruction. This student was transitioning from uncontracted to contracted braille.
- Yes. It allowed me to see and better understand strategies that are beneficial in working with students with VI.
- Yes, it is important for me to see my students in other environments.
- Enjoyed the lessons very much. Learned more about VI techniques and equipment.

Next year Bring Your Boss to Work Week will be November 4 – 8, 2013. Next year we will post student summary forms so you can give context to what is being observed and thank-you notes to give to your administrator. I hope these comments and supports will encourage you to **Bring Your Boss to Work**.

### **Elizabeth Eagan Satter commented on Bring Your Boss to Work Week:**

Recently, Texas School for the Blind hosted the second annual take your boss to work week. I participated and asked several administrators to join me. Due to life happening, only one was able to join me that week. I rescheduled the two others that wanted to join. Long story short, it was the BEST experience ever! The administrator got to see what I do, meet my students, and interact with them. It was entertaining to watch one low vision student try to teach an administrator how to use a monocular to read a sign on the wall at his school. It was also a great feeling to hear another administrator share his positive thoughts about the teaming of the physical therapist and I with two multiply impaired students.

## **TSBVI As A Collaborative Partner**

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

*Abstract: In this article, Superintendent Daugherty discusses how TSBVI works in partnership with the local educational teams to meet the student's academic challenges.*

*Key Words: News & Views, TSBVI, deafblind, blind, visually impaired, least restrictive environment*

Over the past three years Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has worked through an extensive process of examining our services within the context of the current and future needs of the state. We believe we have a mix of programs that make the best use of the available resources: 1) Statewide Outreach services to help build local capacity in the independent school districts (ISD's), and to help parents be informed and effective members of their children's educational teams; 2) Short-Term Programs during the school year and summers that help students enrolled in their local ISDs be more independent in their learning; and 3) Comprehensive Programs (kindergarten through grade 12 or K-12) for those students needing the expertise and intensity of services found on our Austin campus. Our goal is the continuous refinement of our offerings to make sure our work provides the best match for our many stakeholders. This article is intended to highlight the related efforts in our campus-based Comprehensive (K-12) Programs.

By law, TSBVI's K-12 program has long been intended as an educational setting reserved for those students from the independent school districts who are achieving less success in their local schools than their potential would indicate. These students come to TSBVI and are evaluated by a variety of specialists who understand visual impairment, deafblindness and multiple disabilities. Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) are developed from these evaluations and other inputs, and the plans are then implemented by teachers of students with visual impairment (TVI's) working in partnership with a team of blindness specialists supporting each student. TSBVI has been compared more than once to something like the Mayo Clinic, in that it has a special role within the statewide school system much as the Mayo Clinic has within the larger healthcare system. As this analogy would indicate, TSBVI is not intended to be the school where a student spends most of his or her educational career.

Today, school districts seeking to enroll a student at TSBVI experience a process designed to ensure that the student under consideration truly needs the intensity of our services in order to benefit from their education. In many cases this involves TSBVI staff traveling to the ISD prior to enrollment in observe the student and dialog with the local educational team about what is working and what is not. If the student is enrolled in TSBVI, collaboration with the ISD and the parents begins immediately with the goal of transitioning the student back to the ISD once the issues that prompted the referral have been addressed and the student is achieving a greater measure of success academically, functionally and socially.

This process involves travel by ISD staff to better understand TSBVI's methodologies for teaching the

student, and travel by TSBVI staff to better understand the setting and supports to which the student will be returning. In between, there is much opportunity for the family to work with the educational teams from both schools to make sure the transition works for their child. This takes patience, diligence and good advocacy skills, but when these are in place on the part of the parents and educational teams experience tells us that good things are going to happen for students.

To some, this may seem like a change of practice, but it really is not. Special education law requires us to keep students in the regular classroom in their local schools as much as we can so long as the student is learning and making reasonable progress. And when they are enrolled in what is known in law as a *more restrictive placement* such as TSBVI, we are required to establish what it is going to take, and how long it will take, to return the student to the technically *less restrictive* placement in their ISD. Our own conclusion derived from much experience is that having close contact with family and community is a great predictor of successful life outcomes for students. This is why students return home every weekend, and why we have set out an intentional process to collaborate with schools and parents on a transition process to establish the necessary supports for the student to keep learning and growing back home.

All of us have found this to be very hard work, but we now have a considerable body of experience with ISD's and families who have partnered with us to make the process work. It is this collaborative focus that is new to TSBVI and new to those seeking our services. Over time, we will see students moving in and out of TSBVI in a much more seamless process, some for multiple times during their school career. And with our Short Term Programs helping ISD students better meet some of their academic challenges, and our Outreach Services helping ISD's and families improve their capacity to successfully educate students in the local community, TSBVI hopes it has achieved a balanced model that gives high quality supports to all 9,000 students with visual impairments in Texas.

## **White Cane Day**

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

*Abstract: In this article Barbara J. Madrigal shares White Cane Day events that occurred around the state.*

*Key words: White Cane Day, blind, visually impaired, DARS, Division of Blind Services, community awareness event*

Texas has a proud tradition of supporting and celebrating White Cane day. In October, The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Division for Blind Services offices around the state joined together with their community partners and consumers to celebrate the white cane, a symbol of independence for people who are blind or visually impaired. Governor Rick Perry designated October 15, 2012 as White Cane Safety Day in Texas. The proclamation encourages all Texans to promote the safety and well-being of their fellow Texans and notes that, "Individuals with

visual impairments play invaluable roles in the Lone Star State.” It continues, “Supporting their efforts to contribute to our workforce and lead full, independent lives will make for a stronger Lone Star State.”

The first of the state laws regarding the right of blind people to travel independently with the white cane was passed in 1930. Today there is a White Cane Law on the statute books of every state in the union. On October 6, 1964, Congress signed a joint resolution authorizing the President of the United States to proclaim October 15 of each year as "White Cane Safety Day." In the first Presidential White Cane Proclamation President Lyndon B. Johnson commended the blind for the growing spirit of independence and the increased determination to be self-reliant. The Presidential proclamation said: *“The white cane in our society has become one of the symbols of a blind person's ability to come and go on his own. Its use has promoted courtesy and special consideration to the blind on our streets and highways. To make our people more fully aware of the meaning of the white cane and of the need for motorists to exercise special care for the blind persons who carry it.”*

In October 2011, President Barack Obama renamed the observance “Blind Americans Equality Day”. On October 15<sup>th</sup> of this year President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to *“open new pathways for blind and visually impaired Americans to pursue careers in all fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. When the American people have the chance to succeed, we can achieve extraordinary things. Today, we renew our commitment to innovative projects and initiatives that will propel us further toward full access, inclusion, and opportunity for blind and visually impaired Americans.”* Here are some of the White Cane Day activities that occurred across the state in 2012.

### **McAllen**

The celebration was held on October 20<sup>th</sup> at Fireman Park. The event was a huge success due to the teamwork and collaborative efforts of the City of McAllen, McAllen Lion’s Club, El Milagro Clinic, Caritas, Dr. Su, Arise Home Health, Texas Association of Parents of Visually Impaired Children, NFB Rio Grande Valley Chapter, McAllen Fire Department, McAllen Police Department and other individuals who donated their time and talents. The highlight of the event was the walk around the park where participants were placed under blindfold, experienced the use of the white cane and functioning as a person who is blind. Certified orientation and mobility (O&M) instructors provided basic training to all participants and explained the proper use and importance of the white cane. Approximately 370 people participated. In addition there were a variety of activities for kids including face painting, pond fishing, moon jump, community service information by the Lion’s Club, eye exams at no cost by Dr Su, free diabetes screenings and blood pressure readings by El Milagro Clinic and a number of former consumers, promoting their businesses.

### **Wichita Falls**

Over 40 consumers and family members gathered at Lucy Park. DBS staff and community partners were also there to engage in the celebration. Participants were offered the use of blindfolds and canes as the group marched on the hike and bike path around the park. The mayor and a local

newscaster took this opportunity to build their understanding of visual impairment. The Fire Marshall was on hand to provide information about fire safety to the families. The event was capped off with Hawaiian Dancing.

### **Austin**

The day began with a march from the State Capitol to City Hall, where Mayor Lee Leffingwell proclaimed this day White Cane Day. Then all participants walked to Republic Square Park for the festivities. Many partners for the event provided food, activities, entertainment and giveaways. H-E-B (grocery), Rudy's barbeque and a BET operator provided food and drinks. Activities included a tug of war game between TSBVI staff and White Cane Day participants. The Austin Field Headquarters provided activities such as ring toss, bean bag toss, and a sack race with prizes given to each participant. There were also arts and crafts activities and independent living skills training. Blue Mist, a local band, in which all the band members are visually impaired, provided all the entertainment for the festivities.

### **Houston**

Houston held their celebration on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Houstonians of all ages gathered on the steps of City Hall and marched to Hermann Square. Over 300 participants watched as Mayor Annise Parker read the Proclamation and listened to the 2012 Master Chef, Christina Ha share her story. There were over 35 exhibitors sharing information, technology demonstrations and conducting non-visual activities. By working with many local community sponsors, they were able to give away over \$300 in gift cards and giveaways. Lunch was provided by Jason's Deli. Benigno Aceves, IL Coordinator in the Houston office, stated that one of the most rewarding parts of the day was having the opportunity to talk with, provide information and promote white cane awareness to ordinary citizens of Houston who saw the event happening and were curious as to what the event was about. He stated that it was truly a community awareness event!

### **Dallas**

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, over 120 participants marched the mile around Dallas City Hall. Councilman Jerry Allen read the mayor's proclamation and presented Rolinda Duran, Field Director of the Dallas Regional DBS office with a framed copy. There were presentations from many of the local organizations of the blind. Some of these groups include: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), American Council of the Blind (ACB), American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), Dallas Lighthouse, Reading Radio Resources and many more. A number of DBS consumers shared their Success Stories. School children who are blind and visually impaired from 3 school districts came to share in the events of the day. Snacks, juice and water were provided.

My hope is that many of you were able to join your local DARS Division for Blind Services team and participate in the activities in your community. If not, I would encourage you to talk with your DBS partner about how you can get involved in the planning and/or participating in next year's event.

## Resource Spotlight: A Family's Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss

Linda Alsop, Project Director, SKI-HI Institute

*Abstract: This article provides information regarding a new booklet about Interveners for parents of children with a combined vision and hearing loss.*

*Key words: deafblind, Interveners, IEP, SKI-HI Institute,*

The SKI-HI Institute would like to announce a new publication created especially for parents of children who are deafblind - - "A Family's Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss."

A group of six mothers from across the country and Linda Alsop from the SKI-HI Institute created this helpful booklet about interveners for parents whose children have combined vision and hearing loss or deafblindness. Their goal was to develop information so that every parent of a child with deafblindness in the United States could be informed about interveners and their role as individualized supports in educational settings. This booklet is intended to specifically focus on how the need for an intervener for a child who is deafblind can be determined through the IEP process.

The booklet includes some of the following topics:

- Deafblindness and how it impacts the child
- Learning
  - How children typically learn
  - How learning differs for children with deafblindness
- Intervention
  - Definition of an Intervener
  - Role of the Intervener
  - Common misconceptions about Interveners
- Navigating the IEP Process to Determine the Need for an Intervener
- Parent Thoughts and Perspectives
- Tips from Parents

This labor of love helps parents understand the impact of combined vision and hearing loss and provides useful information to them about how to advocate for an intervener for their child. This booklet can be obtained by contacting the SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University at 1-855-357-5571. For more information about Interveners go to [www.intervener.org](http://www.intervener.org)

## Time to Plan for Camp

Ron Lucey, DARS Division of Blind Services

*Abstract: Information about summer camps which specialize in serving children and youth with disabilities, including visual impairment and deafblindness.*

*Key Words: blind, visually impaired, summer camp, CAMP CAMP, Camp Summitt, Texas Lion's Camp*

With recent memories of the holidays still looming, it may be difficult to get motivated to plan for your child's summer camp experience. However, before the last leaves have fallen from Texas pecan trees, most summer camps have already finalized their summer camp schedule. It is important to be aware of the deadlines for most popular summer camps in order to avoid a last minute scramble for camp placements. Some camps may not advertise their application deadline but their summer camp sessions quickly fill up on a first come, first served basis.

Residential summer camp programs offer your child a good opportunity to practice and learn new skills, develop a greater sense of confidence and independence, meet peers with similar interests, make new friends and, most importantly, have fun. Shorter camp sessions or day-camp programs may be recommended for younger campers who may not be emotionally prepared to spend more than a week away from home.

When selecting a camp, parents should visit the facility, meet the camp director or counselors, and talk to parents whose children have attended the camp in past years. Each camp has its own special attributes and no single camp is the "best" for every child. Trying to match the needs of your child with a camp that will meet those needs should be a leading consideration. Careful research will ultimately result in an informed decision to find the camp that is the "best" for your child.

In addition to the well-known and more established residential camps throughout Texas, there are many single-session summer camps sponsored by local agencies and community organizations. Other local camp opportunities include day-camp programs and recreational activities sponsored by a city's Parks and Recreation Department. Some of these programs plan for the special needs of children with disabilities while other programs seek to include children with disabilities into mainstream day-camps and recreational activities. These summer camp and recreational programs are too numerous to list in this article. Information on regional camps, local day-camps and recreational activities may be obtained through several sources. These include your local school district, your child's vision teacher, regional Education Service Center, DARS Division for Blind Services Blind Children's Specialist and Transition Counselor, and your city's Parks and Recreation Department.

## **CAMP CAMP (Children's Association For Maximum Potential)**

[www.campcamp.org/](http://www.campcamp.org/) Camp CAMP offers a series of five-day camp sessions for children and adults with special needs who may not be eligible to attend other camps due to the severity of their disability or medical condition. The sessions take place at the Camp CAMP facility in Center Point, Texas. Each session begins Sunday afternoon and ends on Friday afternoon. Campers sleep in large, wheelchair accessible, climate controlled cabins along with counselors. Each camper is assigned to a counselor with the camper/counselor ratio 1:1 to 4:1, depending on the need of the camper. Camper's medical needs are overseen by health care volunteers – doctors, residents, nurses, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, pharmacy students, and medical students. We also include activities for campers' siblings without disabilities. Campers are divided into "tribes" based on age and gender. They participate in activities and sleep in cabins with their tribe. During the day, campers participate in traditional camping activities: horseback riding, swimming, canoeing, arts and crafts, outdoor cooking, nature, sports and recreation, music recreation, and archery. Night time activities can include campfire with s'mores, karaoke night, carnival, swim night, messy night, scavenger hunt, dance, and the celebrated Pawnee Prom for our older tribe. All activities can be adapted according to the needs of the camper.

Applications are available in February and sessions are filled on a first come, first serve basis. All campers must complete the entire application process before being accepted into a session. For more information, please contact Michelle Elble at [michelle.elble@campcamp.org](mailto:michelle.elble@campcamp.org) or (210)671-8112.

## **Camp Summit**

[www.campsummittx.org/](http://www.campsummittx.org/) At Camp Summit, individuals with disabilities both mild and severe, enjoy traditional camp activities in nature and the outdoors like their non-disabled peers.

Camp Summit's campers may range in age from six to ninety-nine years old. They have experienced a unique longevity in their client base due to the fact that they have no upper age limits. Many of the campers have been coming to and re-connecting with their camp friends every year for 20, 30 and even 50 plus years.

Campers may be developmentally delayed (Down syndrome, Autism, intellectual disabilities, etc.); physically challenged (Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, paralysis, etc.); deaf blind multi-handicapped; or have multiple disabilities ranging from mild to severe. Camp Summit states on their website, "we never deny a campers' participation due to their inability to pay or the severity of their disability. As long as we can medically manage their needs they are welcome at camp."

Online registration will begin January 2013. A sliding scale is available for all campers. Camp Summit also offers partial & full camperships (scholarships) for summer camp. Applicants will be required to provide proof of income and expenses.

## Texas Lion's Camp

[www.lionscamp.com/](http://www.lionscamp.com/) The Texas Lions Camp is located in Kerrville on 500-plus acres in the Texas Hill Country. Texas Lions Camp provides, without charge, a camp for the physically disabled, hearing/vision impaired and diabetic children. The Lions Camp serves children ages 6 - 17 with physical disabilities and children ages 9 - 16 with type 1 diabetes. Although the Lions Camp has onsite medical staff, they limit the number of campers who have specific medical conditions and disabilities. Many parents feel the main benefit their child received from Lions Camp is an improved sense of confidence. Activities include swimming, horseback riding, fishing, nature study, tennis, field sports, and even an overnight camp out.

The application deadline for all sessions is two weeks before the beginning of the session, depending on availability. Camp applications will be available January 6. Families may download the applications from the Lions Camp web page or contact local Lions Clubs. Many Lions Clubs also assist families with transportation and support to get a child to and from camp.

### 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  
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Hillary Keyes  
Bob Cope  
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#### 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).

# Unified English Braille Code Adopted

Braille Authority of North America Press Release

*Abstract: The following press release provides information on the newly adopted Unified English Braille (UEB) code.*

*Key Words: blind, literacy, braille, Braille Authority of North America, Nemeth code*

On November 2, 2012, the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) set a new course for the future of braille in the United States (U.S.) when it adopted Unified English Braille (UEB). The motion, which passed decisively, specifies that UEB will eventually replace the current English Braille American Edition and that the U.S. will retain the Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation. The transition to UEB will not be immediate and will follow a carefully crafted timeline. Implementation plans will be formulated with the input of stakeholders from the consumer, education, rehabilitation, transcription, and production communities. Plans will take into consideration the various aspects of creating, teaching, learning, and using braille in a wide variety of settings. The plans will be designed to provide workable transitions for all involved in braille use and production and to minimize disruption for current braille readers.

UEB is based on the current literary braille code and was developed with input from many people, primarily braille readers, who worked to achieve an optimal balance among many key factors. Those factors include keeping the general-purpose literary code as its base, allowing the addition of new symbols, providing flexibility for change as print changes, reducing the complexity of rules, and allowing greater accuracy in back translation.

Letters and numbers will stay the same as they are in the current literary code. There will be some changes to punctuation, but most will remain the same. Some rules for the use of contractions will change. Nine contractions will be eliminated, and some contractions will be used more often. A FAQ providing more detail about changes is available on the BANA website. After implementation, the official braille codes for the United States will be *Unified English Braille; Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation, 1972 Revision* and published updates; *Music Braille Code, 1997*; and *The IPA Braille Code, 2008*.

More detailed information about UEB and the motion that BANA passed can be found on the BANA website at [www.brailleauthority.org](http://www.brailleauthority.org).

# Deafblind Community Based Apartment Program

Rachel Simpson, DBS Deafblind Specialists Manager

*Abstract: Ms. Simpson shares information about the recent move of the Deafblind Community Based Apartments.*

*Key Words: deafblind, independence, Division for Blind Services, Foundation Communities*

The DARS/DBS Deafblind Community Based Apartment Program was established by Randy Feille in 1991. The program is located in an apartment complex in Austin, where people who are deafblind and people without disabilities live side-by-side. In this program, individuals who are deafblind maintain their own apartments and work in the community with individualized services aimed at maximizing their independence and opportunities to make informed choices. The services offered include training and support in areas such as money management, employment, health management, meal preparation, transportation, communication, social skills and maintaining a home.

We recently moved the program to a new home at Sierra Vista Apartment Complex in South Austin. Our consumers rent their own apartments at Sierra Vista. The Deafblind Apartment Program office and training room is located in the Richardson Family Learning Center, which is a part of the Sierra Vista Apartment Complex. Sierra Vista Apartment Complex is owned by Foundation Communities, which owns and manages several housing communities in Austin and North Texas. Foundation Communities (<http://www.foundcom.org>) is a non-profit organization that provides affordable homes and support services for thousands of low-income families and individuals, empowering them with the tools they need to succeed.

We are very excited about our new home and the opportunity it presents to collaborate with the programs of Foundation Communities. This is such a good fit with the mission of our program and has already resulted in consumers becoming more involved in their community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Barbara J. Madrigal and Susan Hunter for their support of our program and our vision for the program move. I would also like to share a big THANK YOU with the many DARS staff that helped to make the move of our program a reality. We are very fortunate to work with such a great group of people!

# Bulletin Board

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

Email your items for the Bulletin Board to Beth Bible: [bethbible@tsbvi.edu](mailto:bethbible@tsbvi.edu).

An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is posted at:

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/1013-statewide-staff-development-calendar-for-professionals-in-visual-impairment>



### **TATN Statewide Conference 2013**

**Location: Region 4 Education Service center**

7145 West Tidwell

Houston, Texas 77092

June 11 - 13, 2013

<http://www.texasatconference.net>

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### **Active Learning for Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments**

**Location: Region 4 Education Service center**

June 19 - 20, 2013

Learn the fundamentals of Active Learning Theory for students with visual and multiple impairments. Using this approach will move your students from passive to active learners utilizing enriched interaction techniques and environments designed for each stage of their development.

**Save the Dates!!!**

**The 11th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference: Experience the Wonder**

July 25 - 28, 2013

Scottsdale, Arizona

There will be many more conference details in the months ahead so check the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation website often. <http://chargesyndrome.org>

## TX SenseAbilities

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