

SenseAbilities

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

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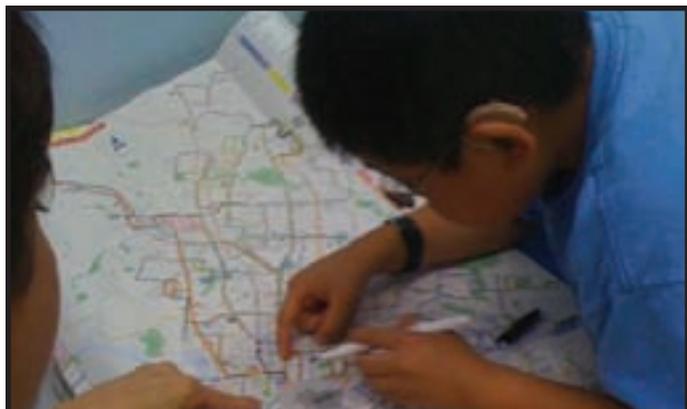
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Students hit the town for two weeks during a special summer program for young people with deafblindness at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Read "From the Classroom to the Community: A Summer Enrichment Program for Students with Deafblindness" on page 17. A report on other TSBVI summer programs can be found in News & Views.

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

Experience is the Best Teacher

Compiled by Jean Robinson, VI Family Support Specialist and Edgenie Bellah, TX Deafblind Project Family Support Specialist, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: Parent leaders share words of wisdom and their experience gained from raising children with visual impairments or deafblindness, including those with additional disabilities.

Keywords: disability, visual impairment, deafblindness, parenting, parent leadership

This July, the National Consortium on Deaf-blindness (NCDB) made available a wonderful publication titled, *I wish I had... Wisdom from parents of children who are deafblind*. Prepared by Paddi Davis, Peggy Malloy, Betsy Martin-Richardson, the publication is a compilation of parents from across the country sharing their thoughts on their wisdom and experience gained by having a child who is deafblind. Of the many contributions made in *I wish I had...*, three are from Texas parents. Following is what they had to share:

I wish I had...

...kept a journal every week, especially about the good things happening in our lives. Kathy Sheriff, Willis, TX

... known the importance of holding my child as much as possible in the beginning. Instead of spending so much time trying to understand the diagnosis, I could have been bonding, rocking, playing, and dancing with my son. Touch is so important to these babies. If I could do it again, I wouldn't stop touching him from the moment I met him. Erin Sefcik, Dallas, TX

... known that with all the tears of sadness there would also be tears of joy. Both sets of tears are unimaginable to most other parents. Most parents know certain things will happen as their child grows. In our world of parenthood, we coach, we teach, we model, and we pray. And when a milestone is reached, it is so meaningful and touch-

ing. The little joys of finally finding her toes. Her first words. Singing "You are My Sunshine" together. Following me around our home without her walker for the first time when she was 2 1/2, with me on the verge of wondering if it would ever happen. Identifying pictures by sight and using sign language successfully. When those events occur, you could never replace them or ask for more. All of those things that were on a list of things she would never do, now DONE. Tears of joy come and you will never feel more love or be more proud in your lifetime. Becky Lowell, San Antonio, TX

When we saw this publication, we were struck with our own wish that we had thought of asking parents this question all through the years of working with them. The opportunity presented itself this year at the graduation of the 2008-2009 VI Family Leadership class. Here are the graduates' responses.

I wish I had...

... known other parents to help me cope with the emotional aspects of having a VI child.

... known earlier about all the different resources available that were available to us.

... known that when people stare, they aren't always thinking the worst. Sometimes people are just curious

and ready to learn about differences. I don't always have to have my guard up.

- ... kept more involved in community activities
- ... been able to let anger go earlier and move forward.
- ... been able to develop better relationships with educators from the start.
- ... looked ahead rather than stay stuck in the "problems we had to face." It would have been easier to see we are on a path to something rather than in a ditch.

- ... allowed more people to learn about my son.
- ... thought "outside the box" more often.
- ... just enjoyed the day with my son, more often.

As you read these parents' thoughts, we encourage you to reflect on the lessons learned in your own journey. Not only does this give you the excuse to stop a moment and celebrate your journey thus far, but it prepares you for the moment when you will have a chance to help another parent learn from your experience. To receive a copy of *I wish I had...*, and read more family stories, go to <www.nationaldb.org>.

Our Trip to the 9th International CHARGE SYNDROME Conference

By Becky and Matthew Lowell, Parents, San Antonio , TX

Abstract: A family shares their experiences in attending their first International CHARGE Syndrome Conference this past July, and how the opportunity has impacted their lives.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblind, CHARGE Syndrome, Texas CHARGERS, Inc., family training.

Laci Faith Lowell, our first and only child, was given the official CHARGE SYNDROME diagnosis in summer of 2008, a few days after her 2nd birthday. It was not alarming or upsetting, it would not change the way we thought of her or treated her, but it did open a whole new area of learning for us. We were familiar with each condition Laci had, many surgeries had been completed and therapies were in place, but we had never looked at it as a "collection". We also lacked in the knowledge of what is yet to come—what we do NOT know.

A suggestion was made for us to attend the International CHARGE SYNDROME Conference in Chicago scheduled for July 09. We were excited to attend, but struggled with whether to take Laci with us or leave her with family. The decision was made to leave Laci at home; it would be our first time away from her and alone as a couple

in a long while. We left San Antonio, TX on Thursday, July 24 for the 9th International CHARGE SYNDROME Conference in Indian Lakes Resort, Bloomingdale, IL.

We arrived at the hotel and we knew we were in the right place! Children who resembled our Laci were there and we immediately wished we had her along. Thursday night we settled in with anticipation of what the weekend would bring. The Conference started Friday with a wonderful breakfast provided for all in attendance. We were immediately approached by fellow Texans and again felt at home. The day started with a very interesting and appropriate presentation by Bryan D. Hall, MD, on how "it" all started, how the CHARGE Association (Syndrome) was first identified. The day continued with 4 breakout sessions with excellent information presented. Saturday started in a similar manner with another four break-

out sessions to attend. Each breakout session had at least 3 different topics to choose from, everything from new family sessions to cochlear implant study results to what is the R & G in CHARGE. A few sessions my husband and I attended together; others we separated to get more information at once. Being parents of a 3 year old, we felt blessed to have some of the sessions be a part of our past—one called the NICU experience and another important topic, anesthesia management—and did not feel the need to attend. Others we hope to tackle at a later date in our journey with Laci, such as one involving a positive vision for employment. Everyone in attendance is always in a different place with their own child, so a number of talks are always appropriate and useful. Some of the sessions that hit home with us included topics like what balance is and how it works, parenting a child with CHARGE SYNDROME, vision issues, and look at me now—a look into a family with an older CHARGE child.

We came home to Texas with questions and answers for our team of doctors and therapists. Laci is now wearing shoe inserts to help with her ankle stability and balance. We have also looked into some special needs planning to benefit her future due to information provided at the conference. Some of the greatest information was passed around between family and parents as we sat together throughout the weekend.



Saturday night ended with a carnival, a great dinner, silent auction, and a special concert by Rachel Coleman of the “Signing Times” series. We really enjoyed the music and know the great benefit sign language has played in our lives as well. *(Editor’s Note: This event was hosted by our very own Texas CHARGERS, Inc. and was noted as a huge success by all in attendance. Thank you, Texas CHARGERS, for sharing with the rest of the*

country this much enjoyed highlight of the conference!)

With all the activities, sessions to attend, and people to meet, one thing the conference did for us was remind us we are NOT alone. As we looked around at a room full of people having some of the same emotions we do, going through some of the same struggles we do, we saw smiles and laughter. The world was NOT passing us by, but we were all moving right along with it—just with a lot more heart, sacrifice, faith in life, and love for our kids.

The conference opened our eyes to a lot of things affecting our Laci now and I know the conference will be a wealth of knowledge to us in the future as well. We plan to attend the next one in the summer of 2011 in Florida, this time with Laci leading the way. Special thanks to the Texas Deafblind Project and DARS for helping us attend the conference this year, and for all the wonderful work they do for our children.

All Things Possible

By Crystal Morales, Austin, TX

Abstract: A young adult with deafblindness shares her journey, shared with her twin sister, growing up with high expectations and encouragement from their mother.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblindness, self-determination, musician

When our Mom, Cynthia, was told her little girls would never make it, she said a prayer: "I will be the best Mother I can. Please let my little girls survive." As a young adult mother to two disabled children she had no idea what was to come. My twin sister Danielle and I were born three months early to meet the world barely even surviving. From having heart surgery at four hours old to having lung disease and multiple other conditions, it was quite stressful, scary, and dramatic.

After many years of medical appointments, physical therapy, medications, speech therapy and special education, we graduated high school at the age of twenty as two eager, motivated, and confident deafblind young adults. While in high school we received great help from deafblind specialists, Braille instructors, and Orientation and Mobility teachers, as well as obtaining assistance from the Texas Commission for the Blind. We knew it would be hard to go to college with disabilities, but knew it was something we wanted, following behind our Mother's footsteps. She stressed how important it was to be educated, find ways to do something no matter how hard, and to never give up.

From age six we loved composing music, writing songs everyday together. As we grew up, so did our music abilities, and we begun performing for small audiences until we put together a concert professionally. We have performed for colleges and universities; on radio stations and a local news station's live music section; at private events; and even in coffee shops and local music stores. Although we enjoyed this so

much, hearing difficulties started making it hard to hear and enjoy our compositions.

Both Danielle and I were born with congenital Nystagmus, Strabismus, Ambliopia and several other conditions of the eyes along with hearing impairment. Mom was told by doctors that we would both be totally deaf and blind by the age of twenty-one, and probably not survive until that age. Mom would stay up at night just crying herself to sleep. Doctors were telling her of horrible conditions and diseases that could eventually kill us.

She found the strength to help us find ways to go to school, even home-schooling for a short time. Danielle and I were also having some trouble with mild seizures that would interrupt our day up to 20 times, leaving us tired and distracted. Those became worse as we got older too; but with all of these things going on, we would remember that one phrase Mom would say, "All things possible girls."

We would eventually compose two CDs of original compositions. We just had to make our first CD with the title "All Things Possible" and our second CD "Meditations". Mom was scared we would lose all of our hearing within the next few years, and wanted to capture our music before it did. Although we did lose a lot of hearing, we never let it stop us. Currently we both have profound hearing loss along with severe vision impairments and epilepsy that do make things hard, but not always impossible.

Today we still compose music in our modified music studio that is accessible. All of

our speakers, amplifiers, and Eq machines make it possible for us to hear our music, even though we don't hear in all the ranges. All of our keyboards, synthesizers, and recording devices are marked in Braille and have hand-brailled manuals and menu pages. Our acoustic instruments, such as the violin, cello, bass, and hammered dulcimer, are individually tuned and mic'd so that we can hear them. We can even connect our FM system to the amp, so that it sends the signal to our hearing aids wirelessly. Even though we had to figure these things on our own, it sure does make us feel good knowing that we can be self-sufficient and creative.

We knew that there would be a way for us to continue composing no matter how bad our hearing or vision would get. Nothing would stop us. This is what we believe today and continue to find new ways to do things. Whether composing music, traveling around the city of Austin, learning sign language and Braille, learning how to meet others like ourselves, or making great friends with many abilities, we live life energetically! Like Mom always said, "All Things are Possible."

Editor's note: You can explore some of Crystal and Danielle's music on the web at <www.youtube.com/user/JumelleMusic>.

My Amazing Grandson!

By Dorothy C. Lewis, Conroe, TX

Abstract: A proud grandmother describes her grandson's adjustment to sudden blindness. He is very involved with family life, friends, and his community.

Keywords: blind, grandparenting, disability, brain tumor, growth hormone, sports

Case is my 5-year-old grandson who has been blind since he was 2 1/2 years old. Tragedy struck in the form of a baseball-size brain tumor shortly after Thanksgiving 2006. On November 26, he had emergency surgery to release the fluid around his brain. Then on December 1, a 16-hour operation was performed at Texas Children's Hospital. The craniopharyngioma (a brain tumor that grows in the area of the pituitary gland and the optic nerves) was removed piece by piece as was the pituitary gland, which had grown over the top of the tumor. Because the tumor was so large, it stretched the optic nerves to his eyes, and he was blind. After three surgeries to release fluid that was leaking from the bur hole, a fourth operation was necessary to insert a shunt to drain the fluid into the stomach area. The good news was he did not have cancer. The bad news was he would have to take 8 pills and a human growth hormone every day for life, and it could grow back.

So far we have been very fortunate. He has two MRIs yearly and blood tests every three months. The pills and shots are extremely expensive. His mother is a single mother who is a flight attendant. She is his rock and support. Case sees an endocrinologist, hematologist, neuro-pediatric ophthalmologist, brain surgeon, and a pediatrician, as well as numerous technicians. This is the background on my amazing grandson.

For the first year after his surgery, he would ask, "Why is it so dark, Mom?" Now he will say, "Did you see that, Mom?" He doesn't seem to realize he is blind. Case attends a small school in Weimar, Texas. The principal and teachers love him, as do the students. I cannot say enough about his school or any of the personnel, including the janitor, counselors, kitchen staff, and secretary of the school. In their own way, they each have helped this little boy.

Case has participated in Track and Field Day with his class and earned a first place ribbon in the races. On relay day, everyone was chanting his name. When they were asked for silence so Case could hear the bells, no one uttered a sound in the gym.



Case's teacher invited Case to participate in T-ball for Weimar. He was a member

of the Angels. He would feel the ball on the T and then hit it. No one hit it for him. To run the bases, he listened for the beeper ball to guide him from base to base. He did not like to make an out, but loved to score a run.

Case does other things as well. He loves his dogs, Cowboy and Jack, and his cat, Hondo. Most dogs sense this little boy is special and protect him. He has a big brother, Tim. They wrestle and play. His cousins will play with him as well. Case loves to ride his 4-wheeler. His mother calls out commands to him, and he responds to her directions.

Case has also ridden the mechanical bull at the Houston and Columbus rodeos. Of course his dad or mother is usually beside him in case he falls. He wants to do mouton busting at the Colorado County rodeo. He loves to go to the ranch to fish and ride the tractor with Papaw, Uncle Donald, Uncle B.W., or whoever will oblige him. He also works puzzles, is learning Braille, helps me in the kitchen, likes to build things with his blocks, and repair things with his tools.

Recently we went to Cabo San Lucas. Case loves the people at the resort and the people there also love him. He never meets

a stranger. Personality plus is my grandson. He charms everyone he meets. Make a Wish Foundation sent him and his family to a Kenny Chesney concert. Chesney autographed his cowboy hat.



He loves to wear his jeans, cowboy boots and shirt, and his hat. He will help brush Tim's show heifers. He also likes to ride horses and is learning to swim this summer.

Case is a strong believer in Christ. His prayers will bring tears to your eyes. He prays for all the sick children, the soldiers overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan, each one of his relatives who are sick or dying and even the devil. He can recite the Lord's Prayer by memory. He has a little friend who has leukemia and was in Texas Children's Hospital, and he prays for her daily. She passed away recently and Case went to her funeral.

As a mother and grandmother I want to acknowledge this little boy for his accomplishments. Last weekend I was at a conference for parents with children who have disabilities. I realize how fortunate we are with Case, but he has done so much on his own by being very, very brave and having a strong support group. For any disabled child, this is a must. He has a loving and caring big brother, and a very strong and beautiful mother who just happens to be my daughter.

The Girl at Disney World

By Kim Cunningham, Pearland, TX

Reprinted with permission from *Future Reflections*, Vol. 28, Number 2, Summer, 2009

Abstract: A mother looks back at the influences that helped her raise a daughter born with a visual impairment to become an independent, typical teen.

Keywords: visual impairment, blind, parenting, transition, expectations, growing up

From the Editor: Kim Cunningham is president of the Texas Parents of Blind Children. A few months ago she posted a note to the NFB Blindkid Listserv, describing an incident that had inspired her when her daughter Kayleigh was four years old. She expanded her post into an article for Future Reflections, and here it is.

I'm sure that every parent remembers the day their child was diagnosed as blind or low vision. For me, it was a life-changing moment. My mind was consumed with one thing -- fear! It was the fear of what I thought it meant to be blind. I had never known or even met a blind person. How in the world was a regular stay-at-home mom like me supposed to have the abilities to raise a blind child? What would this mean for my precious daughter and for the life of our family? Would my daughter be happy? I had fought so hard to save her! Now I knew I would have to fight equally hard to insure that she had a good life. And so our journey began ...

My daughter, Kayleigh, was born severely premature. I never knew if each day would be my last chance to see her. Every trip to the hospital was agonizing, knowing another major complication was right around the corner.

After fifteen surgeries and a four-and-a-half-month stay in the NICU, we brought home a healthy four-and-a-half-pound baby. We were told that she had a severe vision loss; however she should be able to see "some." Some ... What the heck did that

mean? She could see but she couldn't see? Boy, was I confused!

In the following weeks, we were shuttled between doctors, therapists, and teachers. Our new life began as we tried to learn how to parent a partially blind child. Our first teacher of the visually impaired kept using the B words -- blind and Braille. I couldn't even say those words. My fear was all encompassing. I remember one day crying and asking my mother, "What happens if my little girl grows up and is angry because she is blind?" In that moment I realized that I would not give her the opportunity to think or say those words. I knew I must let go of my fear and learn all I could about blindness. I began reading books, attending parent support groups, and asking questions of all the professionals who were now in our lives.

During this time, I kept hearing words like "disabled," "handicapped," and "special." These words strongly connoted not being able to do this or that. The words made me sad. These labels just didn't seem to fit my little girl, who was making progress in every area of development. Don't get me wrong. She was months behind according to her birth age, but during each review of her development, she was climbing the ladder of success. We were on our way -- to where, I had no idea, but nevertheless we were heading in a positive direction.

When my daughter was four years old, we decided to take the family to Disney World in Orlando, Florida. I hoped the trip would

take us away from all the therapies and doctor's appointments, and give us some time to be an ordinary family. Kayleigh had had a cane since she was two, and I knew that she would have a blast exploring the park with her newfound independence.

Disney World is a magical place for children, but this trip made it a magical place



for me also. While we stood in line, waiting our turn to get on yet another ride, I saw a group of teenage girls laughing and giggling like most teens do. They were headed to one of those giant roller coaster rides, I'm sure fully anticipating that this

one would be even better than the last. Then I noticed something very familiar. One of the girls was holding a cane! They were typical teenagers doing typical teenage things, and one of them was blind. No one was holding her hand. No adult was supervising her every move. No stigma kept her from having friends. There was nothing "special" about her except that she was using a cane.

That young lady will never know the impact she had on my life. She showed me what I wanted for my daughter. Now I had a sense of direction and a picture of what my goal would look like. I would raise my daughter to have the same opportunities her friends had. I would no longer listen to the naysayers who painted a picture of gloom. Now I knew that Kayleigh truly was able to have a typical life. I could have the same expectations I would have if she were sighted.

Over the next thirteen years we struggled to educate everyone in my daughter's life about blindness. Most people only thought of their own fears, as I once had myself. There had never been an academic blind child in our school district before, and no one expected Kayleigh to be an accomplished student. Every step of the way I refused to allow her blindness to excuse her from doing her best.

Kayleigh is now a junior in high school and a member of her high school choir. This year the school planned a trip to Disney World. Since I have chaperoned many school events, I assumed that I would have the opportunity to go along on the Disney World trip. Then, a few months before the trip, my daughter informed me that she preferred me not to chaperone this year. She wanted to go by herself. She felt confident in her abilities and wanted to hang with her friends without Mom around. WOW! This was the very picture that I had in my mind when I saw the vibrant blind teenager thirteen years ago. I did it -- I really did it!



Kayleigh returned from her four-day trip full of stories. She told me how she rode the fastest rides, watched shows, had her picture taken with the Disney characters, and shopped in all the stores. As she talked about her trip, my mind kept going back to the blind teenager I saw years before. I thanked that unknown girl who made such an impact on my life. I pray that our children are able to change the lives of other families that are on the same journey. Who knows . . . maybe another family saw my daughter at Disney World, and maybe, just maybe, she made an impact on their lives.

TAPVI TALKS: Sharing Our Experience

By Irasema Ramirez, Member of TAPVI, Laredo, TX

Abstract: A mother describes her experience attending an international family conference for families of children with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness and additional disabilities.

Keywords: visual impairment, deafblind, TAPVI, NAPVI

Editor's Note: Five Texas families were able to attend the International Families Connecting Families Conference organized by the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI). The major sponsors were the American Foundation for the Blind and the Junior Blind. A TAPVI member wrote the article below. Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments is an affiliate of NAPVI. More information can be found at <www.spedex.com/napvi/chapters.html#5> and 1-800-562-6265.

I think it was a wonderful experience for my daughter and me to attend the NAPVI TAPVI



International Family Conference in Costa Mesa California, this summer. We had the opportunity to meet with parents of children with visual impairments and hear from different sources of support for our kids.

My daughter Irasema is 18-years-old with Retinitis of Prematurity (ROP). She was a very premature baby of 24 weeks. She lost her right eye and has very poor vision on her left eye. She graduated from high school in Laredo, Texas and plans to attend community college.

This was truly an international conference as we met many families from other countries. Desmond Brown and Barsha Smith, from the Ba-

hamas, told us the way they help VI students with their educational program. They have support for students like TSBVI. From the Philippines Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (PAPVI) we met Belinda Polintan and her son. They were very happy to get together with families in the United States. We shared information about the support we have in the US. Sitara and Madhu Rangnathan, from India, now living in San Francisco, California, told us that they are working as a team with their school. Aracely Rivera, from Downey, CA, asked me about the programs in Texas because they are planning to move to our state. I introduced Aracely to the people from Texas and gave her some informa-



Texas families attending the Families Connecting Families International Conference in California.

tion and resources that I use to help my daughter. They are from Mexico City, but now they are living in the US.

Another important thing that we learned is that Mr. Barry Stickings and his son, Toby, from the United Kingdom (UK) are members of an organization called MACS (Micro and Anophthalmic Children's Society) <www.macs.org.uk>. This group helps students in their country with technology, financial aid, and most important, emotional support in order to be successful at school. They also have an annual conference and they told us to e-mail them if we are interested in attending.

Dr. Bill Takeshita, Director of Optometric Services at the Center for the Partially Sighted, was the keynote speaker and shared with us very important things. Dr. Takeshita lost his vision when he was 6 years old, and since that age he has worked hard to be successful in his life. Now he is an admirable model for our kids, because he is a doctor and a professor. He suggested that if your child has vision problems, you must encourage them to learn Braille. In my experience if a child can see a little then, the school does not want to teach them Braille. It is very important, like Dr. Takeshita said, "GAMBÁTE." In his language that word means, "Try your best". You can get more information on the center at: <www.low-vision.org>. You can also learn more about the Dr. Bill Foundation and listen to him by going to: <www.drbillfoundation.org>.

There were a lot of sessions and we attended as many as we could. It is very important that you participate in these conferences to learn more about helping your kids.

Sunday afternoon, Farhana Khawar and her daughter from Austin, TX, my

daughter Irasema, and I went to Disneyland. We enjoyed a wonderful evening with our daughters in the park. She shared her rental car and I shared our tickets to the park. They are a nice family.

Irasema and I were very lucky to attend this conference and we hope we can participate in the next one. My husband, Miguel, my daughter "Irita" and myself are here to help anyone that has a visually impaired or blind child. We will share our experiences and all we have learned during these 18 years. We are a team at NAPVI and TAPVI and are here to support each other.

Thank you to TSBVI Outreach for supporting us with the expenses to travel to California and the opportunity to share our experiences with all TAPVI members.



Dr. Bill Takeshita and Irasema Ramirez

Frustrations While Traveling

By Amanda Huston, Student, Nevada, TX

Abstract: A student shares an essay she wrote about her solutions to challenges she encounters while traveling.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblind, ataxia, orientation and mobility, accessibility, self-determination, personal experience

Did you ever get frustrated before? I had a lot of frustrations while traveling. I am deafblind and have ataxia. Ataxia is a disorder that makes my muscles weak. Because of my ataxia I have braces to help me walk. I use a walker to travel and sometimes even need to use a wheelchair. The doors, construction, and elevators are part of the

buildings and they all frustrate me. I have solutions to deal with problems. I am very frustrated about the buildings.

The back door of Dorm K was frustrating me because I could not open it. The back door had a little step and it was hard for me to open because there was no way

WRITING THE ESSAY

By Kay Pruett, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, TSBVI

Last spring, as construction began on campus at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Amanda's Language Arts class was continuing a study of the writing process. For her compare-and-contrast essay, Amanda chose to compare different solutions to the challenges she faces trying to independently negotiate architectural barriers. As part of the process, she read how other authors addressed different problems and possible solutions in their stories. She learned to identify the specific passages and language that described the problems and solutions in the stories and to clearly write about her own problems and solutions. In her essay, she presents an ineffective and an effective solution for each challenge she describes.

To follow the writing process, Amanda began with a list of ideas. In class, we discussed the list and created a five-paragraph structure that would support writing about the ideas she had selected. She wrote her first draft within this organizational structure. In the revising stage, Amanda improved the organization and sequencing of sentences within each paragraph by rearranging strips of paper with one sentence written on each strip. She used a CCTV for this task. Then with her strips taped together in the new order, she learned to "cut and paste" on the computer to revise her document to match the paper document. Finally she edited for spelling, grammar and clarity.

Throughout the process, Amanda approached the challenges of the writing task with the same persistence she writes about in dealing with architectural challenges. What a great life skill!

for me to stand next to it with my walker or wheelchair to pull the door open. I was frustrated about it. I just sat and waited for someone to open the heavy doors for me. Melissa had to help because it was very hard for me. I was late to class because I could not open it, and I didn't want to ask for help. I decided to e-mail Mr. Fain, TSBVI Principal, about it. Brenda Gregory (PT/OT Coordinator), Mr. Fain and John Daude (Director of Operations) all worked together to figure out what is easier for me. They made a little ramp and added a sidewalk on the west side of the door so it is easier for me to open the door independently.

The construction frustrates me too. I feel upset because they had to put a big fence around the middle of campus and it is very hard for people to walk around to get to class. I hate to walk far to my class because my balance is not good and my muscles get very tired easily. I decided to leave my class early so I would not be late.

I am excited about the new buildings but I did not like it when they tore down the buildings because I am very scared of the noise.

Sometimes the elevators are broken and it makes me frustrated and upset. It is very hard for me because I cannot walk up the stairs to my classroom on the third floor. When the elevators break I have to have class in different place, but I do not like that. One time I refused to listen and would not go to math class. I got in trouble and had to go to detention. I asked someone to e-mail the elevator worker and asked them to please fix the elevator.

I hate heavy doors, broken elevators, and construction because it is very hard for me to open heavy doors, walk up the stairs and get to my classes. I have good ways and bad ways to deal with problems. I will deal with the same things for the rest of my life. I am happy that I can deal with things.

Orientation and Mobility: Learning Problem-Solving, and Independence—(a Professional's Response to Amanda's Story)

By Ruth Ann Marsh, COMS, TSBVI Outreach Orientation and Mobility Consultant

Abstract: The author discusses the importance of not protecting students too much so they may have opportunities to learn to solve problems and gain independent skills.

Keywords: visually impaired, orientation and mobility, problem solving, independence

As teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists (COMS), our roles are to help our students develop the skills that will enable them to be successful, not only in school but in the world outside of and beyond school. Part of the goals we have for our students is to teach the expanded core curriculum such as Braille, use of visual aides, adaptive technology, cane skills, use of public transportation, daily living skills, etc. While

all of these skills are needed for success both in school and out of school, the skill that will help them the most is the ability to recognize and solve the inevitable problems that are encountered through one's life.

Most professionals in the field of visual impairment are there because they want to help their students. But what we learn early on is that helping a student sometimes means letting them learn to deal with

problems without our interference and interventions to “fix things”. It’s not an easy thing to do—to stand back and let your students learn from their own mistakes. I, personally have had to literally bite my lip to keep from blurting out information that my student would, given ample time, figure out on her own; keep my hands clasped behind my back to keep from reaching out to physically rearrange something so that it was less of an obstacle; remind myself to wait and give her time to discover her options and then act upon them; etc. I often have invited parents to accompany us on O&M lessons, reminding them to also not interfere, so that they can see how their children are able to handle naturally occurring challenges. Often parents are amazed at what their children can do when given the opportunity.

Of course, making sure that your students are safe is always paramount, but making sure they succeed by falsely removing all or even some of the challenges actually keeps them from developing the problem-solving skills needed to become independently successful. And it ultimately has a negative effect on their self-confidence as they quickly learn that they only “succeed” when an instructor is present. They are not fooled for long.

In his best seller self-help book, *The Road Less Traveled*, Dr. Scott Peck begins his first chapter with the sentence, “Life is difficult.” He goes on to say,

“What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one. Problems, depending upon their nature, evoke in us frustration or grief or sadness or loneliness or guilt or regret or anger or fear or anxiety or anguish or despair... Yet it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has

its meaning... It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually. ...when we avoid the legitimate suffering that results from dealing with problems, we also avoid the growth that problems demand from us.”

None of us want our students to suffer. But dealing with frustrations, and learning that one can work through them and be a better, more capable person is a life affirming, powerful experience. Our students learn not only that they can get around physical obstacles on campus, but that through determination and persistence they can deal with similar obstacles in other environments. Our students learn how and when to be an advocate for their needs, but also how to be creative when problems need to be solved. They learn how to manage frustration and to channel that energy in constructive ways. If students were guided everywhere on campus, they would not have had the opportunity to learn and practice these problem solving skills.

Our O&M specialists, while always ensuring students’ safety, have to stand back and give them the time and encouragement to work through some puzzling, frustrating experiences. But the result is young people who are developing the confidence they need to be successful when they don’t have an O&M specialist along. In her article, “Frustrations While Traveling”, Amanda states, “I will deal with the same things for the rest of my life. I am happy that I can deal with things.” A famous quote by Hodding Carter, Jr. comes to mind: “There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots. The other is wings.” May we always have the courage, fortitude and patience to give our students roots and wings.

Stand up and be counted!

By Jim Durkel, Outreach Teacher, Coordinator of VI Registration and Deafblind Census,
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: the author discusses the VI registration and the deafblind census and answers frequently asked questions.

Keywords: visually impaired, deafblind, census, Texas, demographics

Every year Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired conducts two counts of students for the Texas Education Agency. The largest of these counts is the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments, or as it is known across the state, the VI Registration. The second count is the Deafblind Census. These counts are important for a variety of reasons.

The VI Registration results in reports that help with the distribution of textbooks in large print, Braille, or audio. The VI Reg also is the basis for a report that goes to the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). This report generates Texas about \$1.5 million dollars annually in funds that can be used to purchase special materials created by APH to support the education of students with visual impairments.

The Deafblind Census serves as the basis of a report that impacts the amount of Federal money Texas qualifies for to run the Texas Deafblind Project. That technical assistance team receives about \$.5 million each year to provide school consultation, local, regional, and statewide training for families and professionals, and production of this quarterly publication, *TX SenseAbilities*.

Both the VI Registration and the Deafblind Census are used by a variety of state and national agencies to look at trends and to assist in planning on how best to meet the needs of Texas students with visual im-

pairments, including those with deafblindness.

To help prepare for these up-coming counts, we would like to answer some frequently asked questions.

WHY ARE THERE 2 COUNTS AND HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

There are 2 counts because they are looking at slightly different types of students. Some students may be on one count but not the other.

The VI Registration is the largest with over 8,000 students. It is a count of all students who have a visual impairment or deafblindness as a handicapping condition. It is a count of all students, birth through 21 years of age, who receive services through an IFSP or IEP from a teacher of students with visual impairments.

The Deafblind Census is smaller with just over 700 students. It is a count of students who meet a Federal definition of deafblindness and who may or may not have an IEP that lists visual impairment and auditory impairment or deafblindness as a handicapping condition. Most, but not all, students on the Deafblind Census are also counted on the VI Registration. However, there are some students who may be eligible for inclusion on the Census but not be included on the VI Registration. For example, a student with Usher Syndrome who is not yet

showing much if any field loss should be on the Deafblind Census, but might not be carried on the VI Registration.

The VI Registration asks several specific questions about reading media and visual ability. The Deafblind Census asks specific questions about classroom setting in addition to information about auditory and visual abilities.

The VI Registration is mandated to be a “snapshot” of students as of the first Monday in January. The Deafblind Census is mandated to be a “snapshot” of students on December 1.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO PUT ELIGIBLE STUDENTS ON BOTH COUNTS?

Yes, it is important to put eligible students on both counts. The information collected is different and the reports go to different agencies.

SHOULD BABIES, SERVED TOGETHER BY THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ECI, BE COUNTED?

Yes, if a baby is receiving services from a teacher of students with visual impairments and/or a teacher of students with auditory impairments and meets the criteria for inclusion on the either or both the VI Registration and Deafblind Census, they must be included on the count. Ideally the baby would have a PEIMS number and be registered with the local school district, but this is not necessary for reporting the student on either of these counts.

WHAT IS PARENT CONSENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Parent consent is needed for TSBVI to share information with various agencies. If we can't share the information, this can lead to a decrease in the amount of funding the State of Texas receives from Federal agencies. Without consent, information used for

planning can't be shared, which may mean that your child's particular needs don't get recognized and addressed.

The parent consent form can be found at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/forms/viforms.html>.

WHY DO EXPIRED EYE REPORTS MATTER?

Every 3 years, the IEP team meets to look at assessment data and decide what new assessment data is needed to support eligibility and programming. One of the pieces of information is the eye medical report from an ophthalmologist or optometrist. If an eye medical report is older than 3 years, it is considered expired unless during the Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) an eye medical report older than 3 years is accepted as current. This process of accepting a past evaluation as current may be referred to as “bringing forward”.

Legally blind students with expired eye reports do not generate Federal funds for adapted materials from the American Printing House. To be considered current, an eye report must be no more than 3 years old or have been brought forward.

It is important to remember that vision loss is caused by a medical condition. Medical evaluations are an important part of the evaluation process for a student with visual impairments or deafblindness and should not be treated lightly.

WHEN SHOULD USE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) BE REPORTED?

Use of assistive technology is reported on both the VI Registration and the Deafblind Census. These are the definitions of assistive technology and assistive technology services from IDEA 2004:

- Section 300.5 “The term ‘assistive technology device’ means any item,

piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability.”

- Sec. 300.6 “Assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.”

Under these definitions, AT could include, but is not limited to: any materials in Braille or large print; recorded or electronic books; the use of special paper to eliminate glare and improve contrast; bold line paper; tactile graphics; a Little Room;

a light box; adapted toys such as the APH Tangle Toy; experience books; adapted switches; a white cane; adapted mobility aids; CCTV; any magnifier or telescope; or screen reader. It is easy to see how almost every student with a visual impairment or deafblindness would be using something that counted as assistive technology.

We look forward to counting all of your children, and appreciate your help in completing these efforts every year. If you have any questions or concerns about either the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments or the Deafblind Census, feel free to contact Jim Durkel at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, <JimDurkel@tsbvi.edu>.

From the Classroom to the Community: A Summer Enrichment Program for Students with Deafblindness

By Chris Montgomery, TSBVI Outreach deafblind educational consultant and summer enrichment instructor, & Holly Cooper, TSBVI Outreach deafblind educational consultant

Abstract: The authors describe a two-week-long summer school session consisting entirely of students with deafblindness. Specially designed instructional opportunities included grocery shopping, going to restaurants, visiting an ice cream making store, and visiting a zoo. These activities were used as opportunities for concept development; learning appropriate vocabulary and symbols; practicing orientation and mobility skills; making lists and creating experience books; and choice making. Opportunities for staff development and parent training were also included.

Keywords: deafblind, summer program, expanded core curriculum, communication

In this age of inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, is there a need for a special class for students with deafblindness? The unique needs of such students lead us to believe the answer is yes. The key to quality programming for individuals with combined hearing and vision impairments is the concept of intervention. Intervention is the process which allows an individual who is deafblind to receive non-distorted information such that he or she can interact with

the environment and people. In some cases this process is facilitated by an intervener, in some cases a paraprofessional, and in some cases the teacher. All too often, individuals with deafblindness do not have access to appropriate intervention, so we at the Texas Deafblind Project and TSBVI Special Programs collaborated to develop a special summer school program for some select students with deafblindness to provide a time of high quality programming. We also worked to develop a model



program in which parents and educational team members could observe and learn.

This is the second year Chris Montgomery has organized and taught this special summer session for students with deafblindness. We believe this program has improved every year and provided many opportunities for learning that students would not have otherwise had. This program was developed with the philosophy that all students with deafblindness benefit greatly from experiential learning situations, situations that involve activities in which the student can learn by doing. Many off-campus trips were included in the instructional day to make use of the community as a tool for discovery and experiential learning. These experiences were then used as a way to increase topics for literacy skills, build concept development, and provide opportunities for conversation. The aim was to provide, and further refine, good communication system models (including calendars, routines, and



conversational strategies) that might give family members and teachers of deafblind students some tips and new ideas to implement at home.

Each school day began in the dormitory with students participating in cooking their breakfasts. Students then walked a sometimes challenging route to their classroom, following temporary construction fences and avoiding obstacles that sometimes varied from day to day. In the classroom students previewed their schedule for the day using objects, drawings, printed words or tactile symbols. School-based activities included cooking, art, and physical education.

Classroom work infused literacy into the expanded core curriculum, particularly activities of daily living. Students in this small class had a wide range of abilities from a student with functional mastery of reading and use of the internet to a student whose

primary goal was to improve his emerging communication and social skills. Students discussed foods they wanted to prepare, searched the internet for recipes, developed a shopping list, planned a budget, and went shopping to purchase the items. Activities were used to facilitate the development of concepts and tie concepts to spoken, signed and written vocabulary. Planning included the creation of lists using print and object symbols. Follow up instruction involved staff and students creating experience books in which they described the activity and their role in it. Books were made with print and pictures as well as with braille, tactile symbols and objects and artifacts gathered during events.

In addition to literacy, the class provided learning opportunities in a variety of other areas. Students learned time concepts through use of calendars, schedules and object shelves to discuss upcoming and previous activities. They had opportunities



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for choice making and self determination in choosing the foods for their own breakfast, as well as food projects to prepare in the classroom. They learned and practiced appropriate social skills on campus with familiar people, and off campus with strangers and in unfamiliar situations. Students with deafblindness who have limited ability to communicate often experience anxiety when they go with their families or classmates into public settings, and having support from familiar people who can judge when they may be reaching their limit of ability to tolerate noise and confusion can be an effective way for such students to learn to understand situations and gain skills.



Learning opportunities in the classroom and the community also provided experience and practice in a wide variety of additional skills. Learning to organize work space and materials, and cleaning up and putting away materials are important skills for all individuals; but they are especially important for children with visual impairments as they may not be able to observe others practicing these skills, and may spend con-

siderable time searching for needed supplies. Students also had experience following instructions, whether spoken, printed, or presented with pictures, depending on their ability. They also had experience giving directions to others, requesting and providing assistance, and working together as a team.

The summer program was also used as a parent and staff training opportunity. A wiki (see photo) was created that was accessed with a password to protect student confidentiality. Photos and links to videos were posted daily, along with some discussion of learning activities which occurred and how students responded to them.

One deafblind intervener who works with one of the summer program students in her home district, also came to work with her during the session at TSBVI. She had many opportunities to observe others working with the student, as well as participate in planning and implementing activities. Parents of the students as well as educational team members of one student came to a training the last two days of the program, observing in the classroom and attending workshop sessions on communication, self-determination, infusing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) into functional activities, and making learning activities more motivating.

The staff members who supported this class, as well as other members of the Texas Deafblind Project, hope to offer a similar program in the future. We believe it is an effective method of enriching the educational experience of students with deafblindness, as well as an ideal learning lab for professionals and family members.

Chris Montgomery summed it up:

I think everyone felt that this (experience) gave a lot of depth to understanding how to work with the kids. With endeavors



A wiki, like this one created for summer school, allows multiple users to post information on the internet, and can help team members and families easily and confidentially share photos, video, and other information.

like these it's usually the things you don't plan for that turn out to be the best experiences—the things we take away and remember. I was amazed at the connections that were made during this short two week program. Two of our students became very close friends and worked amazingly well together to solve problems and support each other in the new and sometimes emotional experiences they shared. The staff to student bond was really remarkable too; the kids were able to trust their teachers to help them through the new and sometimes emotional experiences they encountered while away from home. Parents connected as well, trading phone numbers and sharing experiences during the BBQ picnic. In all it felt as if some lifelong friends and connections were made.

The Real World: What I Did for My Summer Vacation

By Kate Hurst, Statewide Staff Development Coordinator,
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach

Abstract: Visually impaired and blind students traveled to Fort Davis for Camp Real World, and learned about science, history, and career planning. The students also enjoyed many recreational and social opportunities.

Keywords: Effective Practices, visually impaired, summer camp, science, history

Sometimes the real world is a great place to be. It is filled with interesting and fun people, scenic surroundings, and fascinating experiences. Sometimes everything comes together perfectly and you find yourself a part of something truly enriching. Vacations often provide this type of experience, and this year mine was no exception.

In the heat of July I traveled to Fort Davis, Texas and the Prude Ranch to participate in Camp Real World. This camping experience, sponsored by the Ft. Worth region of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division for Blind Services (DARS-DBS) and Region 15 Education Service Center in San Angelo, took place July 20-24, 2009. It included 22 visually impaired individuals and 12 of their sighted peers ranging in age from 6–19. Also participating in this wonderful camping experience were numerous staff members from DARS-DBS, Region 15 Education Service Center, and some of the local school districts where the students are served.

There are few places in Texas that can compete with the Ft. Davis area for beauty, history, and nature. Climbing into the Ft. Davis mountains, after leaving the interstate highway at Balmorhea, the air changes and the oppressive heat and exhaust fumes dissipate. Though still warm by some standards, when I arrived at the Prude Ranch, just outside of Ft. Davis, rain has washed the world clean. In the large, rustic dining

room campers were already digging into their cowboy grub. The din of chatter and laughter echoed off the rafters.

Everyone was glad to be there though some were a little homesick. We all wandered around the campground after supper, trying to find our cabins and a cell phone signal so we could phone home. No luck with the cell phone signal, but with some adjustments people unpacked and headed to the meeting hall for dance lessons. Boots were scooted, hips were hopped, and everyone got down and funky. Talk about your ice-breakers! There is nothing like a crowded dance floor to bump into people. Some of us even learned to dance a decent two-step and the Tango Slide.

A Cowboy Breakfast is the only way to get going when there are so many things to do. First there was the trip to the Ft. Davis National Historic Site. The park ranger began our tour with some history of the fort and the region. Ft. Davis was an army post built in the mid-1800's. Cavalry stationed there served to protect the pioneers and traders traveling west. Though destroyed by fire shortly after the Civil War, it was rebuilt in 1867 by Lt. Colonel Wesley Merritt with four companies of the 9th U.S. Cavalry, the first of the African-American troops known as Buffalo Soldiers. Touring the barracks and other sites at the fort, students learned how hard life was for the early Ft. Davis pioneers and the soldiers who occu-

pied the fort. There were many opportunities for hands-on exploration of the gear and equipment the soldiers used.

Returning to Prude Ranch for lunch, we hardly had time to catch our breath before we were trekking down the mountainside to participate in a ropes course. Working in teams the students had to scale a 14 foot wall, get each other through a “spider web” of ropes without disturbing the “spider”, and race on long board “skis” across the rocky ground. Besides brains, teamwork, and physical stamina, this course required everyone to overcome their fear of failure and/or heights for the good of their team.

Thank goodness we all had time for a refreshing swim and dinner before we climbed on the bus again for a trip to the McDonald Observatory. What an amazing experience! Mark Cash, our guide, took us into the observatory of the 107-inch telescope, where we got a hands-on experience of all things telescopic. Students had the opportunity to explore the telescope as it was rotated and positioned while they learned a lot about the work the astronomers do at McDonald. Watching the enthusiasm of some of the students, I was struck with the notion that one of these students might someday work there, now that much of the observation and data collection was done with computers. Leaving the observatory we participated in science demonstrations to understand the size of our own solar system. Then we joined the “Star Party”, looking through smaller telescopes to see Saturn, twin stars and other celestial wonders. One of our students with very little vision was stunned to learn that the spot of light he was seeing was a star. Though he could tell you many facts about stars and space, he had never known that a real star was seen by sighted individuals as a speck

of light, not a five-point object. It made me realize how often our visually impaired students have faulty concepts about the world because of the way we teach these concepts. Even students who were totally blind, came away with a much better understanding of the universe and the types of careers that exist in the field of science. Staff at the observatory have developed a number of innovative ways to teach visually impaired students about astronomy and the universe.

On day three of Camp Real World, Tamee Argo, DARS-DBS Transition Counselor, had organized a series of activities for the students to learn about another world—the world of work. They competed in teams to match various job titles with salaries and training requirements. They learned about safety and first aid. They also participated in work simulations in the areas such as archeology, clerical work, bicycle repair, and using a cash register.

In the afternoon, campers were treated to a living history lesson by the Traylor family. This husband and wife team, along with their daughter, son-in-law, and son, shared information about life in the region during the late 1800’s. Dressed in period costumes, they also gave the students an opportunity to learn about horses, milking cows, and making butter with a churn. They discussed typical jobs that each family member had during that time. Campers even had the opportunity to actually milk a cow and make fresh butter, a tasty snack when spread on crackers that tided us over until supper and homemade ice cream for dessert. Did you know you could make ice cream in a baggie?

No need to worry about gaining weight from the extra treats. Everyone had great

fun after supper playing in our Camp Real World goal ball tournament. Many of the campers had never played goal ball before, and found they had a real talent for the sport. Vance Lankford from Region 15 ESC, with help from the DARS-DBS staff, taught us the game and served as coaches and referees during the tournament. Walking up the hill that night to my cabin, I hadn't felt so tired in years.

Despite the fatigue from the night before, we were ready bright and early to travel to the Chihuahua Desert Nature Center. Everyone was amazed at the variety of plants and animals that are native to this desert region. The students carefully explored the cactus, sniffed the sage, and learned how bats and other creatures help in pollination. One of the students was especially interested in what he learned, and talked about getting a job like our guide when he was older.

This camp gave the students so many "real world" lessons it would be hard to say what had the most impact. However, I particularly enjoyed the lessons and skills that were utilized later that evening as they prepared for the end-of-camp dance with all the other campers at Prude Ranch. After an afternoon horseback ride and another swim, preparations began for the dance. The girls and guys dressed up in their best camp finery and made a promise that they would not turn down a dance invitation from their fellow Real World campers. Then it was off down the hill and into the throng of dancers in the gym. It was so much fun to see how well our group mixed with the other campers. There were a few wallflowers at the start of the dance, but before the night was over, everyone had seized the opportunity to boogie down.

It was a tired crew that found their way into the mess hall the next morning and made their way to the bus for the ride home. As I drove back down the mountain towards Austin I reflected on what a great experience going to camp was.

We are fortunate in Texas to have so many dedicated education and rehabilitation providers who work to pull off summer camp experiences for students with visual impairments. I don't think you can underestimate the impact of such an experience. These students learn that they can go away from home and do okay. They learn both social and academic skills. They learn about taking on a challenge, even when you are a little afraid of it, and succeeding. They make friends. They learn about their visual impairment in terms of what they CAN do rather than what they can't. As an educator, I am reminded of how important experiential learning is and how many lessons can be taught while climbing a wall, milking a cow, learning a new dance, or playing goal ball.

If your son or daughter has never participated in a summer camp experience, you should consider letting them. Many of the DARS-DBS offices and Education Service Centers have day camps or overnight camps throughout the summer. Ask your TVI or O&M instructor what opportunities are available in your area. If you are an education or rehabilitation professional, consider volunteering to help with some of these camps. A summer camp experience is special for any kid, but especially for kids who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Besides re-discovering the joys of camp, you'll get some great ideas for instruction when the summer is over and school begins again.

DBS Staff and Consumers Enjoy Summer Camp!

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

Abstract: this article describes Microsoft's DigiGirlz High Tech Camp for girls where Assistant Commissioner Barbara J. Madrigal, Employment Assistance Services Manager Susan Hunter, and Special Assistant Bill Agnell served as coaches.

Key Words: blind, visually impaired, disability, DARS Division for Blind Services, Digi-Girlz High Tech Camp, Microsoft, accessibility

This summer, several staff and consumers had the exciting privilege of participating in summer camp. Not just any summer camp—there was no horseback riding or target practice and we didn't need any sunscreen. This was the DigiGirlz High Tech Camp for girls, sponsored by Microsoft.

The Microsoft DigiGirlz High Tech Camp for girls was established in 2000. It aims to dispel stereotypes of the high-tech industry and seeks to provide young people a chance to experience, firsthand, what it's like to develop cutting-edge technology. There are DigiGirlz camps across the United States.

During the camp, students interact with Microsoft employees and managers to gain exposure to careers in business and technology and to get an inside look at what it's like to work at Microsoft. For four days, participants experience tours, discussion groups, seminars, job shadowing, networking, and many other activities. This exciting event provides girls with career planning assistance, information about

technology and business roles, thought-provoking exercises, and interesting Microsoft product demonstrations. By participating in the Microsoft DigiGirlz Day, young women can find out about the variety of opportunities available in the high-tech industry and can explore future career paths.

DARS Division for Blind Services sponsored three campers who attended the DigiGirlz camp in Dallas along with Employment Assistance Specialist Freda Striplin. Transition Counselor Kevin Markel reported that DBS purchased transportation and Orientation and Mobility services to assist a consumer from Fort Worth in attending the camp, and Microsoft purchased JAWS for the student's camp computer. Ms. Striplin met the consumer the day before camp to help familiarize her with the environment. She observed that this very

quiet and shy consumer was almost afraid to get out of the cab—she didn't know anyone and was unfamiliar with the surroundings. After one day of camp, however, she was chattering with her new friends and

This exciting event provides girls with career planning assistance... By participating in the Microsoft DigiGirlz Day, young women can find out about the variety of opportunities available in the high-tech industry and can explore future career paths.

told Ms. Striplin, "Look, I'm okay. You don't need to hover!" Both Ms. Striplin and Mr. Markel noted significant gains in confidence as she became more independent in her travel as well as her technology skills.

The camp was so successful that Microsoft indicated they plan to ask for consumer and staff involvement in planning the camp for next year. All reported that they had "lots of fun" and are looking forward to attending next year.

I also had the privilege of attending camp along with my colleagues, Special Assistant Bill Agnell and Employment Assistance Services Manager Susan Hunter. We attended the DigiGirlz camp at Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Washington, where we served as coaches to the young women participating in the camp. We were each assigned to a group of students and accompanied them as they moved from one class to another.

We observed students as they learned to write SQL (a programming language used for developing databases), toured the Microsoft campus to learn about the variety of jobs in the high tech field, used the Microsoft Robotics SDK to program a robot, learned how to market technology, and designed and created their own super girl character! Oh, the things we learned!

One of the "funnest" events was the "Shoutout Board" where coaches or campers would post compliments whenever they

noticed something outstanding. Once a day, all the campers and coaches would congregate at the Shoutout Board to cheer the shoutout recipients. For example, campers were recognized for actively participating in groups, for presenting a different or unique point of view, or for an accomplishment in a workshop. It was great to see these young women develop pride and confidence in their unique skills and abilities.

Mr. Hubbell emphasized the importance to Microsoft of having a diverse workforce and finds that employment of people with disabilities provides a valuable resource in helping to ensure that Microsoft products meet customer's needs.

During our time in Washington, we had the opportunity to meet with Daniel Hubbell, Microsoft Technical Evangelist, or head of the Microsoft accessibility program. Mr. Hubbell was very passionate about promoting accessibility, and he was very receptive as we shared information about blindness and visual impairment. In fact, he knows most of the DARS-DBS vendors,

as our vendors have attended week-long vendor conferences at Microsoft to ensure that they are knowledgeable about and familiar with new Microsoft products. Mr. Hubbell emphasized the importance to Microsoft of having a diverse workforce and finds that employment of people with disabilities provides a valuable resource in helping to ensure that Microsoft products meet customer's needs.

And that concludes my report on summer camp! I also had "lots of fun" and learned so much about technology, which is really equalizing the playing field for people with disabilities. DBS is looking forward to DigiGirlz 2010!

The Next 95 Years

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

Abstract: Superintendent Bill Daugherty discusses future planning for TSBVI and invites dialogue with stakeholders on this topic.

Key Words: William Daugherty, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, future planning, collaboration, partnership

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) is in the middle of so much change with its construction project that it makes us think a lot about the future of the school. By the time all the building is over, we will have sat at 1100 W. 45th Street in Austin for about 95 years. So what does the next 95 look like? A picture from the original 1916 construction shows men and mules standing in the blazing summer heat. It looks almost unbearable, and the mules speak to a bygone era. A picture from three months ago shows men toiling in the exact same spot in 105 degree weather. I stood there too, and it was indeed almost unbearable. So maybe 95 years from now is not a future so fantastic that all of our troubles have been solved by invention and technology. Maybe we are still in the business of educating kids with visual impairments, and if so, what parts of what we do now will still be relevant to Texas, and what parts will not?

Breaking that long view down into decades, we at TSBVI are trying to think how our school can make its best contribution to the state as a whole over the next 10–20 years. TSBVI sees itself as but one part of a statewide system that includes the ISDs, ESCs, TEA, DARS/DBS, the two universities, and all of the advocacy groups representing parents,

educators and blind adults, among others. This statewide system in Texas is widely regarded as the best in the country, and moving forward we all sure want to keep it that way. TSBVI is very well resourced by the state legislature, but these resources are far from infinite and there is constant vigilance from our lawmakers to ensure that there is real value for every tax dollar they invest. So in thinking about the future, we have to think beyond simply adding new programs and services as a way to grow the school's mission and effectiveness.

...we want to engage all stakeholders in an honest and open planning process about our school's future within the context of the 8000+ kids and their widely varied educational needs.

TSBVI Outreach Services and Summer and Short-Term Programs grew out of needs expressed to us by the ISDs as ways to provide additional supports to students who attend their local schools. These initiatives have been successful by any measure, and that's a good thing because they require a significant part of the school's resources to operate. Now we see these fine programs as foundational parts of our service delivery system, and we will continue to grow and refine

them and do more with them. But to "do more" by adding major new programs such as these is not likely in the near term. The discussion we are beginning to strike up with stakeholders right now is how to do more by leveraging the potential of the statewide system as a whole. Terms like cooperation,

collaboration, choice, role release, partnerships and parental involvement define the leveraging as I intend it here.

We all recognize that among the 8000+ students in Texas that there are students who are underserved. Sometimes we think of these as individual kids, and sometimes we think of them as groups. The recent surge in advocacy for students with deaf-blindness by parents and educators alike is an example of an underserved group for which new service delivery supports like interveners are coming on strong. I have to think that among every age group and among every group of learner types—on grade level, not on grade level, multiply disabled, etc.—there are underserved children. What TSBVI is trying to figure out is how we can do our part, and perhaps immodestly, say how we can provide statewide leadership, to ensure that all students have a state-of-the-art education in both the core and expanded core curriculum. Our school somehow has to go about this in a smarter fashion, because as I said before, just adding on and funding new programs is unlikely.

Here are two things I believe many of us think we know on this topic right now. First, students come to our campus or our staff comes to yours only because those of you in the ISDs ask for it. This simple formula covers about 99% of what we do. Second, there are students at TSBVI now who would be best educated in their local schools, and there are students in the ISDs now who really need the intensity of specialized services TSBVI offers. In some important ways both of these groups of students end up being underserved, and this applies to all type of learners.

In the ISDs it seems that the major challenge is time. Itinerant TVIs and COMS are spread thin to say the least. At TSBVI we have the time in comparison to the itinerant model, and often our big challenge is

how to ensure that the intensity of services we provide leads to learning and skills that can be generalized to the next environment after the three years that is the norm for students enrolled here. That next environment is never a campus full of specialists who have teaching access to the student for upwards of fifteen hours a day in classroom, community, and residential living instruction. Both educational settings—the ISDs and TSBVI—are searching for ways to address these two challenges. Kids attending local schools now often have locally developed summer and after school opportunities to fill in some of the gaps created by the time crunch. ISDs continue to inform us about the types of outreach, summer and short-term programs they want from TSBVI. TSBVI continually strives to zero in on the reasons for enrollment at our school, and on the readiness of each student and of the “next environment”, be that the ISD or post-school experience, to be a successful match.

As TSBVI looks forward to the next two decades with a desire to do its part—one part among many—in moving the entire statewide agenda in the direction of continuous improvement, we want to engage all stakeholders in an honest and open planning process about our school's future within the context of the 8000+ kids and their widely varied educational needs. If that process can look at the statewide system as a whole, rather than a loose amalgamation of individual organizations, Texas will stay at the forefront of what is best for all of the students we serve. Please let us know what's on your mind regarding this broad topic; I am always available at <BillDaugherty@tsbvi.edu>. We'll soon be approaching many of you in a more formal fashion on the topic to hear your ideas and issues on how to guide our system as a whole moving forward, and how to best partner with you on your local efforts to make your district or region reach the goals you went into this field to accomplish.

TSBVI Summer Programs 2009

Cindy Bachofer, Special Programs teacher, TSBVI

Abstract: This article gives an overview of the programs, a few examples to illustrate the magic, and information for a student who wishes to participate in 2010 Summer Programs at TSBVI.

Key Words: News & Views, TSBVI, Special Programs, summer

Let's do the numbers: 310 students in 6 different programs; 76 out of 254 Texas counties represented; 43 different classrooms; 80 instructional staff and 70 residential staff; 37 days of Summer Programs with students; 32 days of record breaking 100+ degree heat; 1500 (or so) bottles of water. It was a hot one.

Summer Programs—something between summer camp and summer school—is a remarkable recipe. For a very brief and action-packed period of time, we bring together a diverse group of students who have three things in common: during the school year, they attend school in their home community; they have a visual impairment; and they want to have some summer fun. This combination of factors is a catalyst for remarkable outcomes.

Common elements in each of the programs are development of individual student independence, interaction with peers, and attention to skill building in the nine areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). A variety of community-based experiences help us meet these goals. Skill development in the nine ECC areas is both purposeful and incidental. An experience maneuvering a narrow passage at a restaurant prompts an O&M lesson during an off-campus lunch. Exposure to Career Exploration occurs as students meet a pastry chef at a bakery or a sports facilitator at the Texas Rowing Center before a kayak lesson. Many of the classes include some writing activities, whether using a Braille writer, pen and paper, a video magnifica-

tion device, or a computer. Too much attention to Compensatory Skills or Assistive Technology may start to feel like school, so teachers make these activities fun.



Attention to Independent Living Skills is continuous. Scrambling eggs on the stove, wiping up spilled milk, and loading the dishwasher are common tasks throughout the week as many classes start the day with preparing breakfast. Social Skills are also emphasized. Whether meeting someone in the dorm who has the same birthday, saying hello to the bus driver on the Austin city bus, or agreeing to join in a new game at the swimming pool, social skills are ever present. Students demonstrate Sensory Efficiency by spotting the approaching bus with a telescope, identifying their work site by a sound cue in the environment, or being the first to recognize cinnamon in the air when arriving at the bakery. During all of the examples named, staff members prompt students to voice an opinion, share in the decision process, or propose an alternative option. These steps in Self-De-

termination may take as much courage as harnessing into the rock wall's belay line and grabbing that first hand hold.

Six different programs are designed to meet the wide range of students' needs.

SWEAT (SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE IN AUSTIN, TEXAS):

Looking for a five-week, demanding glimpse of the adult work world? SWEAT is it. Students in this advanced program have a packed schedule of vocational training, job-related skills like interviewing, four weeks of paid work experience, O&M lessons, and household tasks such as buying groceries, cooking, and cleaning. Job sites in 2009 included KOOP radio station, the Austin Humane Society, Dell Medical Center, and more. Students discovered that getting a paycheck is great and it's hard work.



after the workday is an important part of living.

FSE (FUNCTIONAL SUMMER ENRICHMENT)

Summer 2009 offered a two-week and a three-week program in FSE. Promoting interpersonal growth and building functional ECC skills in a supportive, flexible environment are primary goals for these classes. Teachers choose fun activities to work on such concepts as functional literacy, applied math concepts, spatial skills, and self-advocacy. Students learn together about becoming more independent when purchasing produce at a local market, giving a restaurant location to a taxi driver, or trying a new pose in yoga class. Excitement in the learning and everyday tasks are a great combination.

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM

This five-day program allows students with multiple disabilities to enjoy activities



away from home with caregivers other than familiar family members or teachers. The daily schedule emphasizes a structured routine with recommended adult-student ratios. In these settings, students are able to practice routine tasks such as self-care or eating skills, and go on adventures such as eating in a restaurant or playing in the outdoor water fountains at Brushy Creek. The world can become much bigger in five days of new experiences.



ment. Students specialize in a particular interest and may turn out a project such as a creative writing piece or sample a career such as helping to run a radio station. The Getting There class gives a broader look at gaining access to transportation and the It's My Life class used the EMPOWERED curriculum to focus on self-determination skills. The class offerings are as varied as teenage interests.

During Summer Programs 2009, some students met a friend they will still know as an adult. Some students were successful in cutting meat on their plate for the first time. Some students experienced the pleasure and the demands of earning a paycheck. These are the remarkable events we expect and watch for, along with a little homesickness and student growing pains. The reports sent out in the weeks following the program give a more detailed description of each student's experience.



ESE (ELEMENTARY SUMMER ENRICHMENT)

A one-week and two-week program is available in ESE. Classroom topics this year ranged from Pioneer Days to International Horizons to Transition to Middle School. Field Day in the two-week program featured such activities as belly flopping down the inflatable water slide, riding horses, and singing a favorite song in the Karaoke Lounge. The Final Day program for families and friends in the school auditorium let students show off what they learned in Music and PE classes.

ASE (ACADEMIC SECONDARY ENRICHMENT)

ASE class offerings can be a one, two, or three-week program and resemble a list of electives from the school catalog. In 2009, we offered 13 different classes such as Rock Band, Astronomy, and Restaurant Manage-

Summer Programs 2010 is already in the planning stage. To find out more details as they are released, or to apply, go to <www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/summer.htm>. Applications are accepted from early January to mid-February. We are still smiling over the success of 2009.

I'm still hearing words from a favorite summer themed movie—"Are you ready for the summer? Are you ready for a good time?"—as I think of our past summer at TSBVI. "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation." Are you ready for the magic?

Summer Reading: *Poems from My Life*, by Nella Black

Reprinted with permission from Oregon Deafblind Project Summer 2009 Newsletter

Abstract: this is a book review of poems written by Nella Black, a 96-year-old woman who is deafblind.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, disability, Nella Black, poetry

The News and Star, Sunday, 14 June, 2009 has an article about Nella Black by Steph Johnson. Nella is deafblind—and this is her first book. The really "cool" part is that she is 96 years old! The news article states that the book is a "celebration" of Nella's life, "a story of determination and a fight for independence". Nella became deaf at 3 years old and had limited vision until 12 years before this article was written. For much of her adult life, Nella cared for her mother who had suffered from strokes. She was 34 when her mother died. Nella was sent from England and lived in South Africa for a while—first with her brother and then in a home. She had a failed romance with a man who was also deafblind—mainly because her brother thought it was "indecent" for them to marry! With the help of a friend and a charity, Nella returned to England when she was 48.

"Nella has been writing poems since she was 21, keeping them safe in a box and hoping that one day they would be published. "Her ambition has finally been achieved and

Poems from my Life is on sale at W H Smith and Waterstones. The realisation of Nella's dream has been a team effort from her friends, Oriel Temple provided the illustrations and Brian Rudd designed the layout. Nella is able to communicate thanks to a friend who signs questions onto her hand. "And if the public agrees Nella will be able to fulfil another desire and help others with disabilities because the proceeds from *Poems from my Life* will go to Deafblind UK. She told the News & Star: "I'm pleased with the book, it's turned out very well." (News and Star)

Thank you Angela O. of DBCI-CHAT for this info!

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Poems-From-My-Life/Nella-Black/e/9781438939148>

ISBN: 1438939140

ISBN-13: 9781438939148

Format: Paperback, 64pp

Publisher: AuthorHouse

A Memorial Tribute to Karen Crone

By Liz Eagan Satter

Editors' Note: Karen Crone, COMS, for many years the vision and deafblind specialist at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston, and a friend to many of our readers, passed away unexpectedly on September 28, 2009. Liz Eagan Satter, who often worked with Karen during her time in Region 4, summed up the impact she had on so many with this personal story.

This is perhaps my favorite picture I have taken of Karen. This was taken July 15, 2006 at the Snowbird Lodge in Utah. We were out hiking during a break from AER sessions with Sheryl Sokoloski. Shortly after this photo was taken I lost my cell phone and then the "hunt" was on! I noticed it's absence as it was my daughter's birthday and was about to call her. Karen, being the kind person she was, offered me her phone so I could call her. Sheryl and I went on to find the phone, while Karen headed back to man the Region 4 booth in the vendor area.

The three of us spent a lot of time exploring the lodge and nature. Karen encouraged me as I attempted to overcome my fear of heights by taking the tram ride all the way up to the top of a mountain. Never once did she make fun of my obvious nervousness; she only provided support and praise.

Then the three of us decided to do the zip line. This was an activity where you are in a little seat strapped to a wire and you speed

down a steep hill to the base where you have a sudden stop. Karen yelled at me not to forget to breathe. I kissed the ground once at the base. While Karen told everyone how much she hated them and that we forced her to do it. After much laughter and calming breaths later, we continued to explore the area and vowed to NOT do something clearly death defying again!

This is how I hope you all remember her—a ready smile, a genuine laugh, and a shoulder to lean on. I celebrate her life as I know this is what she would want. She was an amazing woman with so much talent, knowledge, but more importantly heart. The

tears will fade in time, but her determination and faith in each of us will live on!

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us."

—Helen Keller



RFB&D Individual Membership is now FREE!

Press Release from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D)

Abstract: this article reports recent funding which provides free individual memberships to RFB&D.

Key Words: blind, deafblind, visual impairment, audiobooks, RFB&D, Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic.

Thanks to major funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Grant #H327D090001, and support of private donors, RFB&D Individual Membership is now free to individuals with proper certification*.

Member benefits include:

- Free access to the nation's largest audiobook library of textbooks and literature titles;
- Human-narrated audiobooks with descriptions of images, tables and graphs;
- Easy-to-use online catalog;
- 24/7 online member services and phone support; and

- Various audiobook downloadable formats, including DAISY and WMA (Windows Media Audio).

Register online for immediate access: <<https://custhub.rfbd.org/Registration>>;

Or download an application: <<http://www.rfbd.org/applications-individual.htm>>.

*Learn more about Certification: <<http://www.rfbd.org/certification.htm>>.

Section Links:

Applications and Forms: <www.rfbd.org/applications.htm>.

Copyright Acknowledgement: <www.rfbd.org/copyright_forms_intro.htm>.

Descriptive Video Service on Home Video Titles Now Available

Press Release from The Media Access Group at WGBH

Abstract: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment Partners with WGBH Media Access Group to Deliver Descriptive Video Service on Home Video Titles.

Key Words: blindness, vision loss, descriptive video service, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, WGBY Media Access Group

Culver City, Calif. (Sept 3, 2009) – Sony Pictures Home Entertainment will partner with WGBH Media Access Group to release select film titles on DVD with Descriptive Video Service®, or DVS®, as an optional feature for audiences who are blind or have low vision. Descriptive Video Service provides carefully crafted narration of key visual elements inserted into natural pauses in dialogue. Key visual elements are those which viewers with vision loss would ordi-

narily miss and include actions, costumes, gestures, facial expressions, scene changes and onscreen text. On DVD and Blu-ray™, the DVS track is an Audio option, listed alongside alternative languages, where the menu selection will read "English Audio Descriptive Service."

The ability to enjoy movies with descriptive narration on DVD and Blu-ray Disc™ is extremely important to the nation's 12 mil-

lion movie fans with vision loss, and is the single most requested service of the Media Access Group. Among the first Sony Pictures Home Entertainment titles to be released with the description feature are *The Taking of Pelham 123*, *The Ugly Truth*, *Julie & Julia* and *District 9*.

Sony Pictures has been a leader over the last decade in providing descriptive audio for theatrical releases in movie theaters equipped with WGBH's Motion Picture Access, or MoPix® systems. Beginning in the fall of 2009, all Sony Pictures theatrical releases with descriptive audio will also include the feature when they arrive on DVD and Blu-ray Disc.

ABOUT THE MEDIA ACCESS GROUP AT WGBH

The Media Access Group at WGBH includes The Caption Center, the world's first captioning agency, founded in 1972; Descriptive Video Service (DVS), which has made television, film and video more accessible to blind and visually impaired audiences since 1990; and the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media (NCAM), a research and development entity that builds on the success of WGBH's access service departments to make existing and emerging technologies

more accessible. Members of the Media Access Group's collective staff represent the leading resources and experts in their fields.

Additional information about the Media Access Group at WGBH can be found at <www.mediaaccessgroupwgbh.org>.

The Media Access Group maintains a list of DVDs with DVS at this page of its site: <<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/resources/accessible-dvds.html>>.

ABOUT SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment is a Sony Pictures Entertainment company. SPE is a division of Sony Corporation of America, a subsidiary of Tokyo-based Sony Corporation. SPHE's global operations encompass motion picture production and distribution; television production and distribution; digital content creation and distribution; worldwide channel investments; home entertainment acquisition and distribution; operation of studio facilities; development of new entertainment products, services and technologies; and distribution of filmed entertainment in 67 countries. Sony Pictures Entertainment can be found on the World Wide Web at <www.sonypictures.com>.

Research Participation Opportunity for Adolescents and Adults with CHARGE Syndrome: Quality of Life and the Ongoing Medical Issues

Announcement from the Helen Keller National Center Website <www.hknc.org>

Abstract: this article is about a research study and requests consumers and/or parents to participate by responding to a questionnaire.

Key Words: blindness, deafblindness, CHARGE Syndrome, research, Dr. Kim Blake, Dr. Nancy Salem-Hartshorne

If you are 13-years or older, and have CHARGE syndrome, Dr. Kim Blake and Dr. Nancy Salem-Hartshorne would like to invite you and/or your parent or guardian to participate in our current research study.

There is still little known generally about the problems older people have when they're growing up with CHARGE syndrome. Dr. Blake and Dr. Salem-Hartshorne would like to ask you questions about your past

life and your present life with CHARGE syndrome. The questionnaire will take approximately 30-45 minutes to fill out and some of the questions will be about the things that are good in your life and not so good. This is described as "the quality of life."

This research study is being conducted by a medical doctor, Dr. Kim Blake, and a Psychologist, Dr. Nancy Salem-Hartshorne, who also has an adolescent son with CHARGE syndrome.

If you volunteer to participate, a packet will be sent to you that will include consent forms and the questionnaire to be sent back to us.

Please contact Dr. Blake or Dr. Salem-Hartshorne via email or telephone if you would like to be a part of this important research!

Nancy Hartshorne: harts1ns@cmich.edu
(989) 774-6469 (Eastern Time Zone)

Dr. Kim Blake: kblake@dal.ca
(902) 470-6499 (Atlantic Standard Time)

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

TEXAS FELLOWS

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters

Texas Fellow

- Karla Cantu
- Tashia Garcia
- Lani Simonton
- Brian Jones
- Emma Lee Wilson
- Mary Kainer
- Cecilia Cox Hayes
- Myleah Rhynes
- Pat Harper
- Barbara Kline
- Carol Dancy
- Bonnie Rudel

Candidate

- Guadalupe Garza-Brown
- Karen Baker
- Cathryn King
- Trish Duke
- Harriet Page
- Kathleen McGann
- Gayla Brown
- Beth Wallace
- Shonda Prater
- Julia Sohns
- David Carabajal
- Norma Freimark



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

BulletinBoard

Announcements / Regional, State, and National Training and Events

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

Some changes are coming to *TX SenseAbilities*!

In 2010 *TX SenseAbilities* is going greener, and jumping deeper into the digital age, by directing more readers to our web-based edition found at <www.tsbvi.edu>. In order to conserve Project resources and take it easier on the planet, we would like to quit automatically mailing paper copies to people who don't want or need them. Soon we will begin collecting a new database of e-mail addresses from our readers, so we can send an e-mail announcement and web link when a new issue is published online. Be on the lookout for a letter from us explaining the details. And never fear: you will still have an option to subscribe if you aren't able to use our web edition and wish to continue receiving a paper copy of *TX SenseAbilities* in the mail!

11th Annual Sowell Center Distinguished Lecturer Series

Virginia Murray Sowell Center for Research
and Education in Visual Impairment at
Texas Tech University

November 7, 2009, 9:00 – 4:00

**Dr. Matt McMahon, Second Sight
Medical Products, Inc.**

Prosthetic Vision

Dr. Matt McMahon will discuss cutting edge technology of prosthetic vision, focusing on the Argus II, a second generation electronic retinal implant, and the crucial role low-vision and vision rehabilitation specialists will play in its continuing development and clinical implementation.

Print and Mail Registration form from:
<[http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell/
LectureSeries/default.php](http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell/LectureSeries/default.php)>

Continuing Education Units available

Effective Intervention with Students who are Deafblind: Training for Educational Teams that Include Interveners

February 19 – 20, 2010

**Residence Inn by Marriott Austin
Downtown/Convention Center**

300 East 4th Street Austin, Texas

This conference will include information helpful to participants who have had previous intervener team training, as well as those who have not had the opportunity to attend training previously. Sessions will include large group as well as concurrent break-out sessions.

For further information and Registration,
check <www.tsbvi.edu>, or contact:

Brian Sobeck at 512-206-9225; or email
<briansobeck@tsbvi.edu>.

HKNC National Training Team

2009 Seminar Calendar

November 16 – 20, 2009

“THE MAGIC OF TECHNOLOGY”

Adaptive Technology Training for Teaching Deaf-Blind Individuals

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

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

Cost of \$550 includes lodging, meals, professional training and manual.

For more information about these seminars, contact Doris Markham

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

E-mail: ntthknc@aol.com; or online at: www.hknc.org/FieldServicesNTT.htm.

January 11-15, 2010

“TOUCHING LIVES”

Interpreting Techniques for the Deaf-Blind Population

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

2010 SWOMA Conference

Annual conference for Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, co-sponsored by the Southwest Orientation and Mobility Association (SWOMA) and Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach.

February 4, 5, and 6, 2010

Austin Sheraton Hotel, 701 E. 11th Street, Austin, TX

The 2009-10 SWOMA Conference will include general and breakout sessions focusing on issues related to orientation and mobility instruction for individuals who are visually impaired including those with additional disabilities. Participants from Texas and other states gather to share best practice strategies for providing instruction in O&M in both educational and rehabilitation settings. Speakers from Texas and other states will share information to help COMS in working with individuals of all ages. This year a special SWOMA dinner will take place on Friday evening that includes some entertainment surprises. Details regarding the agenda will be posted on the TSBVI website this fall.

Registration fee: \$125 for COMS and \$100 for students and parents and includes the cost of the dinner and a luncheon on Saturday. ACVREP credits offered

For more information contact Carrie Keith at CarrieKeith@tsbvi.edu or 512-206-9314; or visit www.tsbvi.edu.

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired TETN Broadcast Schedule for 2009-2010

Please contact the Distance Learning Consultant at your local education service center to access these broadcasts. Sorry, but at this time the distance education broadcasts can be viewed in real time only within the state of Texas.

#35075 – New Teacher Series: Role of the TVI with Students who have Multiple Impairments

Presenter: Chrissy Cowan

Wed. Nov. 11, 2009 – 1:30–4:00 PM

Helping new teachers get off on a good footing, this first of a 3-part series will focus on the role of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired in serving students with visual and multiple impairments. Master teachers are encouraged to join in to share their expertise.

#35072 – Teaching Science to Students with Visual Impairments

Presenter: Margaret Robinson,
Special Programs Instructor, TSBVI

Wed. Dec. 2, 2009 – 1:30–3:30 PM

A critical core curriculum area is Science, and students who are visually impaired need a good foundation in the sciences like their nondisabled peers. Margaret Robinson offers practical strategies, interventions, and resources for teaching science to a student with visual impairments.

#35069 – O&M for Babies and Pre-Schoolers

Presenter: Ruth Ann Marsh, O&M
Consultant, TSBVI and Beverly Jackson,
COMS, Round Rock ISD

Wed. Dec. 9, 2009 – 10 AM–12 PM

This broadcast will shed light on the role of the COMS in working with babies and pre-schoolers, and discuss assessment strategies and instruction for children birth to six.

For more information contact Kate Hurst at 512-206-9224 or <katehurst@tsbvi.edu>; or you can check the TSBVI website at: <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/de.htm>.

#35068 – New Teacher Series: Role of the TVI in Literacy Instruction

Presenters: Jayme Wratford, VI
Consultant, Region 13 ESC and Ann Rash,
VI Outreach Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

Thurs. Jan. 14, 2010 – 1:30-4:00 PM

This broadcast, the second in a 3-part series, will help new teachers gain a better understanding of how they can support literacy learning with their students and why they should be doing this.

35070 – O&M for Students with CVI

Presenters: Ruth Ann Marsh, COMS/
O&M Consultant, and Sara Kitchen,
TVI/VI Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

Wed. Feb. 3, 2010 – 1:30–3:30 PM

Ruth Ann and Sara share a discussion about providing orientation and mobility to students with cortical vision impairment. What are some of the considerations for the O&M Assessment and how should COMS modify their programming approaches for students with CVI? Tune in and find out.

#35067 – How TSBVI Can Support Math Instruction

Presenter: Susan Osterhaus, Math
Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

Wed. Feb. 9, 2010 – 1:30–3:30 PM

TSBVI offers a variety of supports for teaching math to students with visual impairments including web-based resources, Special Program math classes and workshops. Learn more about these resources and how to access them from Susan Osterhaus, math teacher extraordinaire.

TAER 2010
Reaching Beyond
Expectations

March 25-27, 2010

El Tropicano Riverwalk,
San Antonio, TX

For more information check
<www.txaer.org>.

Save the dates!
2010 Texas Focus
Family Pre-Conference

June 9, 2010

2010 Texas Focus Conference

June 10 & 11, 2010

Dallas/Plano Marriott at
Legacy Town Center, Dallas

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

Fall Semester 2009

December 3–6** High School Independence Weekend #1: Camping (grades 9-12)

December 10–13** Elementary School Independence Weekend #1 (ages 9-11)

Spring Semester 2010

January 10–15 High School Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 9-12) *Access*

January 21–24** Looking Good (self care, independence, sexuality, socializing,
manners)

Jan. 31– Feb. 5 Elementary Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 1-5) *Access*

February 21–26 Junior Access to Academic Skills #2 (grades 6-8) *Access*

March 25–28** "Traveling with Low Vision" Weekend (grades 9-12)

April 8–11** High School Independence Weekend #2: Prom (grades 10-12)

April 15–18** Low Vision Tools & Strategies: Elementary

May 6–9** Elementary School Independence Weekend #2 (ages 6-8)

May 13–16** Junior Independence Weekend (grades 6-8)

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

"Access" = needed by visually impaired students in order to access the core curriculum. Goals for Access to Academics classes are individualized by request, and could include areas such as technology; tactile graphics; math or science tools; braille literacy; ILS; and other areas from the Expanded Core Curriculum. For Access classes with a "Special Focus," students may work in that area or choose any other area of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

More information is available at: <www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/short-classes.htm>.

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

Dr. Lauren Newton, Principal of Special Programs

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

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Outreach Program
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