



SenseAbilities

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

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SEE/HEAR, published for the last 11 years by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in collaboration with the DARS Division for Blind Services, has a new look and a new name! We hope you enjoy the first issue of *TX SenseAbilities*.

Formerly *SEE/HEAR* — A collaborative effort of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and DARS Division for Blind Services

Editor's Note: This issue marks the end of an era, and the beginning of a new tradition—a time to say farewell to SEE/HEAR, and welcome to the first issue of TX SenseAbilities.

SEE/HEAR was formed in 1996 as a merger of two newsletters published by the Outreach Program at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI): P.S.NEWS!!!, edited by Kate Moss; and Visions, edited by the late Sue Currey. At that time TSBVI secured a collaborative partner for publishing and distributing the new publication, the Texas Commission for the Blind (TCB), now the DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS). TSBVI and DBS will continue this partnership in the future with our new TX SenseAbilities.

Kate Moss guided SEE/HEAR through the years as it evolved from a small project “newsletter” to a quarterly publication with 40 pages of personal and family stories, followed by information and insights from leaders in the fields of visual impairments and deafblindness. As the publication grew, Kate formed an editorial staff, which will continue to work on this new venture. For the last few years, I have enjoyed working with Kate as co-editor of SEE/HEAR, and plan to regularly seek her advice as we move forward with TX SenseAbilities.

We all look forward to providing an interesting and informative publication. Please let us know how we can continue to make it a useful resource for you.

David Wiley, Editor

Two Challenges, One Unique Woman: She may be blind and hearing impaired but JoAnn Rand is a lot like everyone else

By Jennifer Edwards, Odessa American Staff Writer
Photos by Cindeka Nealy, Odessa American
Reprinted with permission from the Odessa American

Abstract: Parents share their journey of having a daughter with deafblindness, including how they felt upon receiving the initial diagnosis and sending her to residential school out of state. The article also shares with the readers how JoAnn is living a productive life full of typical activities that bring her enjoyment and satisfaction.

Key words: blind, hearing impaired, deafblind, deaf, disability, grief

The woman with the pretty smile, dark glasses and fingers sensitive as catfish whiskers is normal, and her parents want everyone to know it. JoAnn Rand has worked at Red Lobster 12 of her 41 years; loves bowling, hates not having a schedule and has a penchant for fried chicken and Mexican food.

She just happens to be blind and hearing-impaired, like the 4 million others in the nation who share one or both disabilities, according to the 2000 Census. Of those, 320,000 live in Texas.

“She’s just a normal young lady, except for the loss of hearing and vision,” her



Celestine Rand, left, looks on as her daughter JoAnn decides which pair of shorts to purchase by feeling the texture of the material Wednesday as she shops for a gift for a friend at the Music City Mall.

Though Celestine briefly got a rash on her face during pregnancy, neither the Rands nor their doctor suspected there was a problem with JoAnn. They didn't suspect it on the day JoAnn was born, either. Then, they knew.

Dr. Wheatley Stewart came up to Celestine's room in Medical Center to break the news about their new daughter, asleep in the hospital's nursery. "He said he thought JoAnn was going to have a problem with her vision," Riley Rand, now near 70, said. "He saw the film collecting on both eyes."

Celestine and her husband were stricken by the news. "If I'd have known, I might have expected something," she said. "But it was a shock. We were both pretty much devastated."

mother, Celestine Rand, said. "She loves to shop with a capital S, and take trips." JoAnn bears this out, signing a familiar response into her mother's palms when asked, "What do you want to do?" "Shop," signs JoAnn. For shirts — she tugs at her own, bright pink polo — and pants.

When she gets a moment away from working or shopping or covering the calendar in her room with braille appointments, she'll go into the family room and listen to 45s on the old, cabinet-style record player. Among her favorite artists are others that share her challenges — Stevie Wonder, Ronnie Milsap.

She's normal, and always has been, but it took her family years to realize that.

BRINGING HOME BABY

The year was 1963, and Celestine Rand was 26, and very pregnant with JoAnn. She, husband Riley Rand and daughter Jacqueline, then 7, lived in Odessa, where Riley was a pump mechanic for Winters Pump Corporation. He was 29.

The hardest thing, at first, was the loss of the plans they had made, for a larger house, for other things.



Rand adds the Red Lobster seal to a bundle of silverware Tuesday while at work. Rand has been employed at Red Lobster for the past 12 years investing two-hours a day, three days a week rolling around 150 bundles per hour.



JoAnn Rand communicates with her mother by feeling the signs from her hand Tuesday at Red Lobster. Rand, 41, is blind and has lost an average of 70 percent of her hearing, caused by a case of the German Measles that she contracted before birth.

"It had a great impact on me," Riley said. "When you're young, you don't think about anything like that, something that will change your whole life. Everything that you had goals for, everything went zero."

For years afterward, Celestine would think that it was a piece of fruit she ate that had destroyed her baby's sight. Later, she found out that it had been Rubella.

FINDING NORMALCY

The Rands brought JoAnn home to the house they still inhabit on Dobbs Avenue, a comfortable split-level sided in warm, brown brick. Here, said Riley Rand, JoAnn had a normal life. She rode a tricycle. She snuck off down the street. Once, she even tried to motor off in the Rands' car. "She broke one of the glass ashtrays and she realized it wasn't right," Celestine explained. "So she went and jumped into the car and started it."

That headstrong attitude, (which she has, to this day, managed to keep) still couldn't hide the fact that something still seemed to be wrong with JoAnn, now 3.

"My brother-in-law mentioned that he didn't believe JoAnn could hear very well," Riley Rand said. "He would clap his hands and say, 'Come here, JoAnn,' and she wouldn't respond." Mom had noticed signs, too. "I had mentioned to her doctors about her not being verbal," she explained. "The doctors here kept telling me not to worry about it."

But Celestine persisted, and finally got a referral to a hearing and speech center in Houston. The second blow fell. Their daughter had a second challenge: She had 65 percent hearing loss in one ear, 75 percent of the other.

"When you're a young man, you wonder, what's next?" Riley Rand remembers.

After the diagnosis, they knew they'd have to let her go at a time when they wanted to hold on the tightest. They were going to have to send her away.

SET HER FREE

When JoAnn Rand was 5-years-old, mom Celestine Rand braided her thick hair into pigtails and slipped a yellow and white checked dress over her head. Then she slipped a white sweater over the little girl's arms. It was January and it would be cold in Alabama.

Then mom, dad Riley Rand and sister Jacqueline, then 12, piled into the car. Together, they drove nearly a thousand miles to the Helen Keller Cottage in Talladega, Ala.

This is where she would attend school, far away from her family, literally in the dark because of a visual impairment that became complete blindness by the time she was 7.

Thirty-six years later, Celestine still chokes up talking about this time. "At first, she was happy because, at the time, she really didn't understand that we were going to



“I was persistent about her having a life outside of home,” she said. “And I knew she could be productive.”

SITUATION NORMAL

Now, 40 years after the Rands found out about their daughter’s blindness, they’ve stopped looking for normalcy. It found them.

It lives in JoAnn’s everyday bedroom, with its big bed, brightly colored quilt and boom box.

It resides in the routines they’ve developed over the years, of shopping and traveling and baking and eating, and generally just being together.

leave her,” Celestine Rand said. “Everybody was crying, including my husband. It was the first time I’d seen him cry.” But JoAnn adjusted.

At the school she learned to have a normal life among her peers. She picked up sign language, learned to decipher Braille. Her teachers even taught her little things, like how to line up her shoes in a row so she could find them more easily in the morning.

At home, her parents missed her terribly. “She was fine,” Celestine Rand remembers. “We were the ones who couldn’t adjust. We had many a crying session at Dallas Love Field,” when it came time to send her back to school.

She eventually moved from Helen Keller to Austin’s Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where she graduated at 22. These days, mom and dad have the satisfaction of knowing they did the right thing.

And, of course, it blooms in JoAnn herself.

Denise McVea, an intervenor who spends several hours a week with JoAnn, explained it like this: “When I first started working with her, I thought about all the things I thought she couldn’t do,” she said. “Then, I found out just how much she can.”



Texas Charger's Festival 2006: Out of a Fun-filled Day, A Texas Family Organization is Formed

By Cathy Springer, Texas Chargers President & Deafblind Family Leader, Round Rock

Abstract: In October, families of children with CHARGE syndrome traveled from across Texas to participate in the Texas Charger's Festival 2006. Read about their exciting day and the non-profit organization that has formed as the result of this successful festival.

Key Words: Family, blind, deafblind, CHARGE syndrome, Texas Chargers Association, retreat, training

We are happy to announce that the Texas Chargers had their 1st Festival at Peaceable Kingdom Retreat in Killeen, Texas. It was a huge success with 21 families and about 160 people attending. We had CHARGE kids ranging in ages from 13 months to 18 years old.

The day started out with representatives from different agencies from Texas sharing specific information about living with special needs children. We had the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Deafblind Outreach Program, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services- Division of Blind Services, and Texas Parent-to-Parent there to answer questions and share information.

We also had a carnival for all the kids to enjoy. The kids were able to have snow cones, cotton candy, play all kinds of games, jump in a jumping house, and ride a train. I think the train ride was the favorite for most kids.

Everyone was able to sit down and enjoy a fajita lunch. Next, we had Therapy Central with speakers talking about music therapy,

vital stem therapy, and hippotherapy. While the parents were listening to the speakers, the kids got to go to the movie theater and arcade with the volunteers.

The families had a great time and were able to network and learn from each other. We had several families that had never met another CHARGE family. We also had 9 new families join the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation.



By the end of the day it was obvious that there was a growing need for the families to get together so we will make this an annual event free to the families. To help us accomplish this, we are in the process of forming The Texas Chargers, a non-profit group.

The Texas Chargers is a group of Texas families, friends, and professionals who are dedicated to helping children and young adults who live with CHARGE syndrome. The primary function of our group is to support the emotional and educational needs of people with CHARGE syndrome and the families and professionals working with them to provide them with a better quality of life.



The Texas Chargers goal is to help provide and access information specific to Texas families. We will do this by providing a stress-free retreat annually in Texas for the families where they can connect with others to share the joys and challenges of raising someone with special needs.

The Texas Chargers will support the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation in every way possible to continue their growth and success in promoting awareness and re-

search regarding CHARGE syndrome's identification, cause and management. We will encourage all members to attend the bi-annual conference put on by the Foundation to allow our families to access the valuable resources they provide.

If you would like to get additional information or want to participate in our next event, please contact Cathy Springer at <dacspringer@austin.rr.com>.

Wave at the Blind Lady! Helping Your Blind Child Interact with a Sighted World and Helping the Sighted World Interact with Your Blind Child

By Kathy Seven Williams, Blind Adult

Reprinted with permission from Kathy Seven Williams 7/3/06. Visit Kathy's website at <<http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/do2be/>>.

Abstract: Through her personal stories of being blind, the author illustrates the importance of addressing interactions from two perspectives: how to initiate comfortable interactions with people who have limited opportunity to be around blind people; and how parents can teach social skills that are essential to being accepted by others.

Key words: family, personal experience, blind, visually impaired, social skills, parenting

Over the decades I have found that people do best when you give them an option of what might be a good thing to do. People often want to be friendly or helpful or interact with another person, but may not

know how. It took me until I was in my 40's to develop the ease to simply say, "I can't see you and I don't recognize people. Would you please tell me who you are when you approach me?"

Now that isn't such a hard thing to say. Wouldn't you think it would just come trippingly off the tongue? But it was like asking for their first born. I always felt it would be taken to mean I didn't care enough about someone to find a way to recognize them. I knew about these blind people who could keep a catalog of every voice they'd ever heard and know exactly who was speaking from two rooms away. Not me! I'm a mere mortal. Well, once I learned to ask for a little help, I discovered people are pretty quick on the uptake and are pretty great about getting the idea, but it's still hard for me. Asking for assistance by saying "I can't see such and such could you please help me with it?" has gotten a bit easier over the years.

So how do you help your child learn to do this? You begin by facilitating a path for people to follow to interact with your child. Tell them what they should do when they first meet your child. My folks, unfortunately, used to just say, "She doesn't see properly." This was more an explanation for why I had embarrassed them than a way to open the door for the other person to approach me more appropriately. I always felt so bad because I was trying so hard to do it all right. One of the great gifts you folks can give your wee ones is the ease and skill to instruct the public on what will work in an interaction with them.

When my kids were in high school, a vanload of my daughter's friends went by while I was standing at the bus stop. One of her friends waved to me then later asked if I was mad at them because I didn't wave back. Traci just laughed at him and he realized his oops. From then on, the kids would call to me from their cars, "Wave at the blind lady!" After we moved out of state a couple of them even phoned just to say hey, but what they really said was, "I just called

to wave at the blind lady." Then they would bring me up to date on their lives.

Unfortunately we have to teach one person at a time because if you haven't experienced something it's really hard to imagine it accurately and people seem to imagine blindness with horror and fear or sympathy and condescension much of the time.

It's really good to start giving your kids words to speak of their blindness early so they aren't left bewildered about people and interactions. I don't think there's anything wrong with explaining to your child that because of the way his eyes work they don't look at other people the way the people expect them to. He can learn to work extra hard at orienting his body and face toward the person he wants to speak with to make up for some of this confusion of face behavior.

One of the things I whined at most growing up was when my parents would make me look at what I was doing even though I couldn't see it. It seemed totally stupid to me and like they just didn't want to admit I couldn't see stuff. But in a sighted world the less different you are the better you are accepted and included. By looking like I was looking people were less uncomfortable around me and I was included more. In later life this goes for jobs and activities as well as social events.

It may not be right, but it is true that people would rather you don't look blind because it makes them uncomfortable. Too bad for them aside, people aren't going to do what makes them uncomfortable—that's just real. Of course, the down side of looking more or less "normal" is that people don't know I can't see and don't offer the help I may need freely so I have to work harder to get it. But in the long run I think I miss out on far less this way.

Ten tips to help you... Teach Yourself Braille

By Amber Bobnar, Ivan's mom, Kealahou, Hawaii

Abstract: We've learned a lot about literacy in the past ten years. Evidence continues to show that when a child's world is filled with the written language, it promotes strong literacy skill development. But what do you do when you have a child who will likely read Braille? Learn Braille yourself and look for opportunities to encourage your child to use it too! This article is packed full of great suggestions and tools that parents can use to learn Braille themselves and have fun promoting their own children's learning.

Key Words: Family, blind, Braille instruction, parenting strategies, field-based research

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted with permission from WonderBaby <www.WonderBaby.org>. We have included another article written by Amber Bobnar in this newsletter so be sure to check out Teaching your blind baby...Sign Language!

Maybe your child is just getting ready to begin learning Braille or maybe your blind infant is years away from phonics lessons but you want to get a head start. Whatever the reason, as the parent of a blind child you're going to need to know Braille. You may not be planning to be your child's primary educator, but you will want to have an answer when she comes running up to you asking, "Mom, what's this say?" And the earlier you learn Braille, the better, so you can encourage literacy in your baby from the beginning.

Braille is difficult, but it's not impossible to teach yourself. Here are my Top Ten Tips to help get you started...

#a First, get yourself a good Braille instruction book. I like Just Enough to Know Better: A Braille Primer by Eileen Curran. Yes, it has a funny name, but it's a really great book with lots of example exercises.

Our vision specialist brought us a free copy along with a bunch of other free Braille supplies (like a Braille table mat, Braille magnetic letters, and a print-Braille children's book) from National

Braille Press as part of their Read-Books! Program.. Check out their web site at <www.nbp.org> or ask your vision specialist for more information.



#b Think about taking a course from the Hadley School for the Blind. Hadley offers free courses to parents of blind children through their Family Education Program <www.hadley.edu/Web_Site/2_c_family_ed_program.asp>. The courses are self-led with an instructor's knowledge to back you up. They're free and so are all materials. Hadley offers two Braille courses: Introduction to Braille and Contracted Braille.

#c Get yourself a Braille label maker. You can find one online at www.sightconnection.com (they usually go for about \$40), but see if you can get one for free from your vision specialist, early intervention program, or school district. Once you have it, label everything! In order to learn something like Braille, it helps to be surrounded by it everyday.

Also, if your baby is going to be a Braille reader, it's important to introduce him to Braille as early as possible. Sighted kids are surrounded by print (on TV, in books, on cereal boxes, on DVD cases... everywhere!), so when they begin learning to read, print letters aren't all that new to them. It should be the same for your future Braille reader. Get used to labeling everything so that you can practice Braille and your baby can experience as an everyday part of normal life.

#d Getting your own dictionary and flash card set can also be a big help. The Braille Bookstore www.braillebookstore.com/view.php?C=Introducing%20Braille sells both.

#e You should also try to get a Braille writer. They're very expensive, so see if your school district or vision specialist can get you one. We have one on loan from our state's Library for the Blind. You can also ask them if they will sell you one of their old ones at a discounted price (but be sure they have it serviced first so you know it's in good condition).

Once you have a writer, use it to Braille a scrap book or journal for your child to read when he gets older—remember, your child won't be able to look at pictures of himself when he was a baby, so you need to collect memories in other ways.

If you want to check your contracted Braille, you'll want to get a print-Braille translation program. These are very expensive (some even more than \$5,000!), but the Duxbury Braille Translator (DBT) has a free demo at www.duxburysystems.com that will check your sentences for you—of course, some of the real cool features are disabled, but the demo will work in a pinch. And it's free!

#f Sign up with your state's Library for the Blind at www.loc.gov/nls/find.html. Through the library you can order audio books for your child (we were surprised at how much our son enjoyed audio books from a very early age—even at 9 months!), Braille books, and print-Braille books. Start with some print-Braille books. You can read them to your baby, he can feel the Braille, and you can practice your Braille skills, too.

#g Speaking of books... Get more books! You can register for a free Braille book from Seedlings www.seedlings.org, or join National Braille Press' Children's Braille Book Club www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/cbbc/index.html. You can either choose to receive a notice of each month's book and decide whether or not to buy or you can sign up for their Annual Subscription and receive 13 books for \$100 a year. Maybe a bit pricey, but that's only \$7.69 per book!

#h Check out BRL: Braille Through Remote Learning at www.brl.org. This site offers lots of Braille resources, from online dictionaries to self-led courses. They also cover specialized code like chemistry and music Braille.

#i Whenever you have the chance, sign up to receive newsletters and correspondence in Braille. This is a fun way to practice Braille and your child will

feel like Braille is really a part of the big world when she notices Braille in your post box.

#1j Speaking of Braille in the big world... Remember to point out Braille to your child in public places. Whenever you notice Braille on an elevator or on a sign, let your child feel the symbols while you read what it says.

Finally, here's an extra tip: download and print our Braille Cheat Sheet at <www.wonderbaby.org/printables/braille-

[cheat-sheet.pdf](#)>. This blank sheet is a simple way to write down contracted Braille symbols that you may have a hard time remembering (for example, I can never seem to remember the "SH" symbol). Keep the sheet with you and use it as a reference when you're reading. Eventually you won't need it at all!

And while you're at it, you can also download our Braille Alphabet & Numbers Sheet at <www.wonderbaby.org/printables/braille-letters-numbers.pdf>. Post it on your refrigerator for quick reference.

Teaching your blind baby...Sign Language!

By Amber Bobnar, Ivan's mom, Kealakekua, Hawaii

Abstract: There is a growing body of evidence supporting the trend to teach babies sign language. Walk into any bookstore childcare section and you'll be sure to find a bookshelf devoted to the subject. While most are written for typically developing babies, families and professionals who work with visually impaired children (including those who are deaf-blind) have also found sign language a wonderful way to give a child another avenue to communicate. The author of this informative article outlines the research-based evidence for using sign language with blind babies, shares simple tips for teaching sign language, and highlights several websites for supporting families along the way.

Key Words: Family, blind, infant communication, sign language, parenting strategies, and field based research

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted with permission from WonderBaby <www.WonderBaby.org>. Ivan's parents started WonderBaby.org as a way to share with others what they've learned about playing with and teaching a blind baby. Their goal is to create a database of articles written by parents of blind children. No doctors or therapists on their wonderful website—just real life advice and real life experiences. If you have an idea or article to share, please let them know! They'll post your article along with a picture of you and your child, if you wish. We have included another article written by Amber Bobnar in this newsletter so be sure to check out Ten tips to help you... Teach Yourself Braille.

It's the hot new trend these days... sign language for hearing babies! The basic idea behind this movement is that very young babies are intelligent enough to communicate but lack the maturity to control vocalization. Without a means of dependable communication, babies must resort to crying to get their message across.

However, if you teach your baby a few basic signs, like more, eat, and diaper, they can tell you what they need through hand gestures rather than tantrums. And studies show that signing babies learn to talk faster and pick up foreign languages easier when they get older. Amazing!



But can sign language work for blind babies? Signs are made to be very visual, can blind babies really pick them up? We're here to tell you first hand, YES! Our son, Ivan, began learning signs at about 14 months old and he really took off (in the photo above he is signing "bib" while sitting in his high chair). He learned his first sign, "more," in less than an hour and once the idea of communication was in his head, there was no stopping him.

WHY SIGN?

The evidence in support of signing is immense. Here are some reasons why you should consider teaching your baby signs:

- Signs give your baby a way to express themselves before they are verbal.
- Learning more than one language is great for language development.
- Babies who sign will have an earlier understanding of the English language and may learn

to speak earlier.

- Babies who sign may possibly have a higher I.Q.
- Signing can lower your baby's frustration levels because they can communicate with you.
- Your baby may even trust you more because he knows that you understand what he is trying to tell you.

For the visually impaired baby, the benefits are even greater:

- Blind children often have problems identifying body parts. Since signs are dependent on the body, they can increase body awareness.
- Similarly, signs can help blind children understand that gestures and movements, otherwise known as body language, can be a form of communication. This can make it easier to teach a blind child that other people can see them.
- Many blind children also have speech delays. Teaching them signs early on can help prevent any speech delays.
- Another problem signs can help you avoid are fine motor delays. Signs can improve finger dexterity.



SIGNING TIPS

Here are some simple tips to help you get your baby started signing...

1. Begin with an easy sign, like "more." Play a back-and-forth game with a favorite toy. Every time you have the toy, ask your baby if she wants more, help her make the sign with her hands, then give it to her. I know it sounds incredible, but Ivan picked up this first sign in less than an hour!
2. Introduce one sign at a time and try to pick signs that your baby will want to use, like eat, diaper, bib, or ball. Choose signs that are significant to your baby. In the picture to the right, Ivan signs "diaper" right before a diaper change.
3. Accommodate your baby's little hands and fingers by simplifying signs. We aren't trying to teach our babies American Sign Language, just a private means of communication. Likewise, if your baby adapts a sign to fit their needs better, let them! Ivan, for example, doesn't put his arm up for the sign "up," he puts his hand behind his head, but we all know what he means!
4. Watch your baby carefully because he will begin to make his own signs. We noticed that every time we were about to put Ivan's bib around his neck he would place his right hand on his chest and pat his chest with his left hand. We quickly realized that this was Ivan's sign for "bib."
5. Signs will lead to verbal words and when they do there will be a period where your baby will use both at the same time, but eventually the sign will



gradually disappear to be completely replaced by the verbal word. It's sad to see the signs go but remember that this is the transition from baby signs to talking.

Have fun with your baby and don't pressure them to sign. Signing isn't for everyone! But if your baby does enjoy signing, encourage it with lots of hugs, kisses, and praise. What a wonderful way for your young baby to communicate with you!

Below are some sites that show different baby signs so you can get started signing with your baby, but remember that you can always make up your own signs, too.

Signing Baby Dictionary <http://signing-baby.com/main/?pp_album=main&pp_cat=signing-baby-dictionary>

Video Dictionary of Signs <<http://www.mybabycantalk.com/content/dictionary/dictionaryofsigns.aspx?letter=A>>

Baby Sign Printables <<http://www.bilby.net/Sub/BabySign/BabySignPrint.asp>>

Our Friend Mikayla

By The Bubel/Aiken Foundation and Kimberly Resh

Reprinted with permission from Hand in Hand, the Pennsylvania Deafblind Project, *Information Update*, Fall, 2006 <www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/DB/DBNewsFall06.pdf>.

Abstract: Third grade students author and publish a book about friendship and acceptance after having a student with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness, in their classroom. Mikayla's mother includes a personal note about their experience with full inclusion.

Key words: family, deafblind, disability, inclusion, friendship, acceptance, children, parenting

The Bubel/Aiken Foundation (Clay Aiken's charity for the inclusion of children with disabilities) recently gave a grant so a group of third-grade authors could publish a book about friendship and acceptance. "Our Friend Mikayla," the story of a child with severe developmental disabilities, who finds true friendship and connection with her typical peers, will be published this fall.

Written and illustrated by third-grade students at the Lower Nazareth Elementary School, Nazareth, PA., "Our Friend Mikayla," is an honest portrayal of the children's first reactions to Mikayla, their barriers to acceptance and finally the deep friendship they formed with her. Mikayla, now 11, was born with profound brain damage resulting in spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, severe mental retardation, seizure disorder, legal blindness, hearing impairment, and numerous medical conditions related to her disabilities. Despite the severity of Mikayla's disabilities, her parents strive to give her as normal a life as possible. When they moved to Pennsylvania four years ago, the idea of full inclusion for a child with severe developmental disabilities was relatively new. Yet in keeping with their own personal philosophy, they requested that Mikayla be included in a regular first grade class.



What they found was that Mikayla's classmates accepted Mikayla and began to see her as "just like them." Their relationship with Mikayla and their journey to acceptance inspired the book. "Our Friend Mikayla" became the class project, mainly because Mikayla's friends felt they had an important message to share with other children. Their goal was to teach other kids that, "From Mikayla, we've learned that people with disabilities aren't really different. It doesn't matter if your friend is in a wheelchair. Their disabilities don't mean you cannot be friends. Having a friend with a disability is cool."

The children have dedicated "Our Friend Mikayla" to "all people with disabilities and their friends." When they chose the dedication, one of the children realized that might mean they were dedicating the book to everyone in the world.

The book will be sold on The Bubel/ Aiken Foundation's website and all net proceeds will help support the Foundation's efforts towards full inclusion. The book will be available at <www.bubelaiken.org> this October.

The Bubel/Aiken Foundation provides services and financial assistance to promote the

full integration of children with disabilities into the life environment of those without. The Foundation strives to create awareness about the diversity of individuals with disabilities and the possibilities that inclusion can bring. To learn more about The Bubel/Aiken Foundation or ways to get involved visit the website at <www.bubelaiken.org>.

**PERSONAL NOTE FROM MIKAYLA'S MOM,
KIMBERLY RESH**

While Mikayla doesn't have any immediate life threatening conditions, doctors have always predicted a decreased life expectancy for her. They warn that she will probably eventually suffer a severe aspiration event that will take her life. As a parent, it is impossible to prepare for the loss of your child. It's difficult to even think of. We can't help but worry about the eventuality and wonder how long we will have with our beautiful daughter. When asking a friend how long she thought Mikayla would live, she replied simply, "as long as she has a purpose." Her words touched my heart, and often bring me comfort.

I also think most parents wonder why any child would be affected by a disability. My personal belief is that the world needs to be filled with different types of people with varying abilities. This diversity builds understanding, compassion and acceptance, making us all better human beings. While my theory may have started as a means by which to justify my own daughter's disabilities, her inclusion in a regular classroom has confirmed my thinking.

We have always favored the idea of inclusion, yet in the beginning we were afraid. Like all parents, whether their children have disabilities or not, we were scared that Mikayla would not be accepted. From time to time we still worry, but in every instance

our fears are unfounded, as children are the most accepting of Mikayla's disabilities. They are innocent, pure and unbiased by society's perception.

Mikayla's friends invite her to roller-skating parties and push her around the rink in her wheelchair. At bowling parties they argue over whose turn it is to help her shove the ball down the adaptive ramp. I must admit we were greatly amused when Mikayla was invited to a rock climbing party. Still, I took her so she could be with her friends, particularly the birthday girl who wanted Mikayla at her party regardless of her inability to climb. Kids never cease to pleasantly amaze me. When one girl wanted to set-up a "playdate" with Mikayla and I asked her what she'd like them to do, she merely wanted to read to her. Now she's trying to get me to agree to a sleepover...I guess it'll be at our home!



As a parent, I truly understand and respect every family's decision regarding placement for their child. While inclusion is the right choice for Mikayla and our family and I'd encourage others to give it a try, I realize other children may need alternate educational settings to succeed. If this were the case, I'd hope their parents would seek out other opportunities for inclusion in their community. While children with disabilities benefit from these inclusive experiences, so do their non-disabled peers. Mikayla has silently taught her friends some of life's most important lessons.

I will always wish there were a way to repair the damage to Mikayla's brain and allow her to fully experience all life has to offer. Yet, she has a most important purpose. Despite her profound disabilities, my daughter couldn't make a greater contribution to this world. She is a gift we share with others. I hope all parents do the same.

TAKS-Alt: The Times...They Are A-Changin' for Assessing Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

By Peggy Miller, Deafblind Specialist/ Speech-language Pathologist,
Texas School for the Deaf, Austin, TX

Abstract: This article provides an overview of TAKS-Alt, the new statewide assessment in Texas for students with significant cognitive disabilities. It also provides suggestions to help teachers, administrators, and parents prepare for the changes.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, assessment, TAKS, TEKS, TAKS-Alt, LDAA, NCLB

Teacher: "TAKS for my students? You are asking me to do WHAT???"

Parent: "I'm thrilled! We're raising the bar for my daughter's education!"

Administrator: "Who will do this? When? Why? How? Will it go away?"

The quotes above are from real people who are sharing the adventure of the new statewide assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities called TAKS-Alt (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills – Alternate). This past November, twelve teachers in the Special Needs Department at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) completed assessments for the TAKS-Alt Pilot on twelve students, grades 3 through 11 in Reading or English Language Arts (ELA). It was time-intensive, challenging, frustrating, interesting, surprising and more; we made mistakes and called TEA many times for clarification. We are now preparing for more assessments across more subject areas for the TAKS-Alt Field Test to begin this January. This article is written to give a brief overview of TAKS-Alt with some suggestions learned from TSD's participation in the Pilot administration of this test. Our task was made considerably easier by having so many people to support us. Even if you are the sole special educator in your district, please know that you are not alone in this adventure!

BACKGROUND

These are exciting and challenging times in special education. As Dr. Diane Browder from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte said at a recent workshop in Austin, "Nationally, we are being asked to move to a new house and take the best of teaching practices from the past and bring them into a future where we are adding academic content to functional skills curriculums for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities." As part of this move, new assessment practices for these students are required by federal law, specifically, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB requires that all states include students with disabilities in state assessment systems. THIS IS A BIG CHANGE!!!

Texas' state assessment is the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the state curriculum is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The Student Assessment division of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) developed the TAKS-Alt to comply with federal law. Beginning in January 2007, more than 1,000 school districts in Texas will be required to participate in the Field Test for TAKS-Alt. This translates to assessing more than 40,000 students who are receiving special education instruction and who meet all five of the following participation criteria developed by TEA.

The student:

- requires supports to access the general curriculum that may include assistance involving communication, response style, physical access, or daily living skills, and
- requires direct, intensive, individualized instruction in a variety of settings to accomplish the acquisition, maintenance and generalization of skills, and
- accesses and participates in the grade-level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) through activities that focus on prerequisite skills, and
- demonstrates knowledge and skills routinely in class by methods other than paper and pencil tasks, and
- demonstrates performance objectives that may include real life applications of the grade-level TEKS as appropriate to the student's abilities and needs.

The state will no longer be recognizing the functional Locally Determined Alternative Assessments (LDAA) that are traditionally given to students with the most severe cognitive disabilities. Districts no longer have the option to use their own "locally determined" assessment protocol such as Student Portfolio Assessment, the BRIGANCE, or Student Performance Indicators; schools must follow state standards for assessment. The state will evaluate the results from the TAKS-Alt Field Tests for students with severe cognitive disabilities and set a standard for passing. TAKS-Alt will be fully operational beginning with the 2007-2008 school year ...and it is definitely with us for the future!

WHAT EXACTLY IS TAKS-ALT?

The "Alt" in TAKS-Alt represents "alternate achievement standards." Students with significant cognitive disabilities are mandated to have access to the general education curriculum; in Texas this is the TEKS. These

students will be assessed using alternative achievement standards. TAKS-Alt is linked to grade-level TEKS that are reduced or modified to reflect prerequisite skills. TAKS-Alt is not a pencil-and-paper test for students. Instead, it is based on teacher observations that occur during teacher-designed activities that are scored using the TAKS-Alt Rubric. Each activity must relate to an "essence statement" developed by TEA; these statements summarize the TEKS knowledge and skills statement and student expectations for each TAKS-tested objective. All of the results are entered on-line through the TEA website for TAKS-Alt. That's a lot of new vocabulary to understand!

Here is how it may look for one activity for reading for a 3rd grade student:

TAKS Objective: The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts.

TEKS Knowledge and Skills Statement:
3.8 The student develops an extensive vocabulary

Essence Statement: Expands vocabulary

Prerequisite skill: The teacher reviews the links to the TEKS provided by TEA and determines her student can be assessed on this prerequisite skill –"use new vocabulary in everyday communication"

Activity: The teacher designs a specific activity for assessing this skill that must include at least three measurable and observable predetermined criteria. The teacher assesses the student on these criteria, scores performance, offers an opportunity for generalization if appropriate, and enters the results (with supporting data) on-line.

WHICH SUBJECT AREAS ARE ASSESSED?

TAKS-Alt follows the same requirements for TAKS testing. Consequently, subject areas are assessed at enrolled grade levels as

Figure 1 – TAKS Requirements for Subject Areas

Grade	ELA	Reading	Math	Writing	Social Studies	Science
3rd		X	X			
4th		X	X	X		
5th		X	X			X
6th		X	X			
7th		X	X	X		
8th		X	X		X	X
9th		X	X			
10th	X		X		X	X
Exit Level (11th)	X		X		X	X

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

follows (also shown in Figure 1 above).

3rd Grade: Reading, Math

4th Grade: Reading, Math, Writing

5th Grade: Reading, Math, Science

6th Grade: Reading, Math

7th Grade: Reading Math, Writing

8th Grade: Reading, Math, Social Studies, Science

9th Grade: Reading, Math

10th Grade: English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Social Studies, Science

Exit Level/11th Grade: English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Social Studies, Science

WHAT DO TEACHERS NEED TO DO TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

Teachers must complete training modules on-line before administering the test. Modules 1, 2 & 3 are available to anyone interested in TAKS-Alt; parents are encouraged to take a look, too. You can access these through <<http://pearson.learn.com>>. Module 4 is about the actual on-line assessment tool that is available to teachers conducting the test during the “testing window” which is January through April 2007 for the Field Test. All data must be finalized on-line dur-

ing the “submission window” from April 2 through April 13, 2007.

The modules explain how to access the general curriculum, conduct and record observations using a specific hierarchy of prompts and cues, use the TAKS-Alt Rubric for scoring students’ performance, and determine the best method to document data that supports the score. There are also resources for time-management and links to the documents needed to create activities. It is very important to know and use the three documents TEA created specifically for TAKS-Alt: the TEKS Curriculum Framework, TEKS Vertical Alignment, and TEKS-Based Examples of Instructional Activities. You can access these directly at this site: <<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/>>.

HOW MANY ACTIVITIES ARE REQUIRED TO ASSESS A STUDENT?

Many, many, many! For the Field Test this spring, teachers are required to create four activities per subject area. To give you an idea of this task, a student qualifying for TAKS-Alt testing enrolled in the fourth grade taking the Field Test will be assessed on four activities that the teacher developed in each of these subjects: reading, math and writing (12 total activities). A student in the

10th grade will be assessed on four activities in each of these subjects: ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies (16 total).

Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, teachers will be required to assess their students on six activities per subject area linked to state and teacher selected essence statements. That means, for example, that a teacher who has a 10th grade student qualifying for TAKS-Alt will create a total of 24 activities for that one student and assess, record, and score performance using the TAKS-Alt protocol. In reality, we know that many classrooms for students with significant disabilities are multi-age and contain more than one student. Teachers may find that they have to create 50 to 100 activities! Keep in mind that many activities can be used or modified for other students and other subject areas.

HOW WILL I, AS A TEACHER, ACCOMPLISH ALL OF THIS? HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:

Acknowledge that this first year is a challenge for all of us.

It does get easier after you learn the “lingo” and go through the process for one activity. Look at what you are already doing through a different pair of glasses and you may find you can link some of what you are teaching your students to a TEKS pre-requisite skill. Expect that this will be the most difficult for students with the most profound disabilities at the presymbolic level. For these students, creative minds need to come together and task-analyze the most basic of skills to link them to grade-level TEKS. Try your best to maintain a positive attitude – take it one TEKS essence statement at a time!

Be prepared.

Become very familiar with the resources TEA provides; these are very valuable. Go back and review the training modules as often as needed. Although

the modules state they can be reviewed in 30-35 minutes, our teachers found they needed much more time to access the important links provided for the resources and documents that are used to create and administer the test. Plan and participate in additional trainings, including those offered on TEKS-based instruction. Manage time wisely. The average time teachers in the Pilot said it took to go through the process of creating one activity for one essence statement was three hours, not including the actual time doing the activity with the student. Some districts funded extra, paid workdays this year; we used our full day in-services, after school training times, and planning periods for our teachers. Begin thinking about a plan for next year; you will have a better idea of what is needed after completing the Field Test this spring. The good news is that the essence statements will be available to all districts by the time school begins next fall, so teachers can begin early and have most of the year to complete TAKS-Alt. TSD is looking ahead at who will train new teachers, how to maintain a database of activities created, and how many in-service days will be needed for activity development and review of the important concepts.

Connect with others.

Talk with your administrators and explain the details of the TAKS-Alt. Although administrators have been informed of this new assessment, they may not yet have an appreciation for the complexity of the process. Ask for ideas on how you can be supported; the responsibility of TAKS-Alt does not rest solely with the classroom teacher. Identify people in the district or region who can help such as the district assessment coordinator, curriculum specialists, educational diagnosticians, behavior specialists, or other support staff who have experience writing measurable and ob-

servable goals. Contact the Low Incidence Disability (LID) Specialist and/or Deafblind Specialist at your Educational Service Center for support; many LID specialists are providing trainings or forums for creating TAKS-Alt activities based on your requests, so speak up! Ask about the TETN broadcasts TEA is providing on this topic; check the TEA website for more information at <<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/>>. If you cannot attend the TETN, you can download the presentations from the website. We immersed ourselves in whatever anyone had to offer on the subject and always found something helpful to use.

Don't be reluctant to contact TEA directly.

Pat Otto, Debbie Owens, Janet Borel and the team at the Student Assessment Division are available to answer questions and clarify information. We contacted them many times, and following the Pilot, we invited them to speak to our staff regarding a variety of questions that came up. In a positive, non-critical way, they reviewed some of our activities and helped us to see where there was room for improvement. They can be reached at (512) 463-9536 or through email at <Patricia.Otto@tea.state.tx.us>, <Debbie.Owens@tea.state.tx.us> or <Janet.Borel@tea.state.tx.us>.

Download the key documents.

We found it helpful to spiral bind separately the Curriculum Framework and Examples of Instructional Activities for each grade level and subject for easier reference; be sure to copy the Essence Statements, too. Our teachers have several binders of TAKS-Alt information. Print the data collection form you want to use and the hierarchy of prompts and cues; keep these with you when you assess your student. Study the rubric carefully before scoring your student.

Enlist support from others to print the volumes of information needed; this is costly. Find a system that works for you!

Expect glitches and mistakes to happen, as this is in its infant stages.

Lots of little bugs are being worked out based on suggestions and feedback from the districts that participated in the Pilot. TEA takes the suggestions seriously and makes changes within the constraints of the law that mandates assessing students across the scope and breadth of the general education curriculum. But, no, they are not going to reduce the number of essence statements. They are, however, prepared to provide more examples of activities available to view on-line, and they are encouraging all of us to send them tools, tips and ideas so they can be shared statewide.

AND MOST OF ALL . . .

Focus on the students!

We were surprised by what some of our students were able to do on modified academic tasks. While this is a big challenge and a shift in thinking for many of us who are concerned about our students not getting enough time to learn important functional skills, remember you are not being asked to throw out all the good things that you have been doing for your students. You are being called to set the bar higher and find ways for them to have access to the curriculum taught to their peers. While not an easy task, I do believe special educators are among the most creative and brilliant of educators. By putting our heads together, we can adjust to these changing times and make something good happen for our special students!

Making the Best of It: Getting More Bang for Your Therapy Buck

By Chris Strickling, OT, Ph.D., TSBVI Deafblind Outreach Consultant

Abstract: This article describes the role of occupational and physical therapists in school settings and offers ways to help them successfully participate in the educational programming of students with visual impairments and deafblindness.

Key Words: Programming, blind, deafblind, visually impaired, occupational therapist (OT), physical therapist (PT), related service, collaboration

For more than a decade, I have worked in Texas public schools as an occupational therapist who provides consultation to deafblind students and their educational teams. In my capacity as Outreach Consultant with TSBVI, I have traveled across the state and met many teachers, therapists and other professionals working together to create meaningful learning experiences for their students with visual impairments and deafblindness. As we learn more about deafblindness and visual impairment, and how both impact learning, instructional strategies change. There are now reliable alternatives to the Perkins Braille that make writing easier and more efficient. Computer software is friendlier and offers more substantive content. Inclusion is a priority. It's hard to keep up with the changes, but well worth the effort.

Even the way that therapy services are delivered has changed. Over the past few years, therapists have begun to embrace the educational model of service delivery. Their services have become more embedded into classrooms, which seems to be a move in the right direction because it means that therapists work side by side with instructional staff to share knowledge and insure that the student's needs are met. Still, several common problems persist. First, almost all school-based therapists are itinerant. Because they are not in daily contact with the rest of the team members or the student, therapists often find it difficult to be fully

integrated into the educational team. Second, most school therapists have caseloads of up to or exceeding 50 students, which means that services to all of them are limited in terms of time. Third, most school-based therapists have inadequate training related to the impact of low vision, blindness or deafblindness on functional, social and academic skills. I recently surveyed the five Texas universities that offer occupational therapy education and discovered that blindness and deafblindness are not substantially addressed in any part of the curriculum. In terms of educating therapists about the needs of these students, nothing seems to have changed since I graduated from OT school in 1978.

Despite this lack of formal preparation, many therapists do successfully participate in the educational teams of children with visual impairment and deafblindness. In most of the schools that I have visited, the OTs and PTs understand the need for related services and are advocates for the students. One significant problem, which is primarily an institutional issue, is that therapists are uncertain about what their role(s) should be with blind and deafblind students. Similarly, classroom teachers and teachers of the visually impaired, as well as O & M instructors, are often unsure about what the OT or PT could offer to the team. Many therapists have no exposure to the field of Orientation and Mobility, so it does not occur to them to collaborate with O & M in-

structors in serving the child. In much the same way, not all therapists know what a teacher of the visually impaired does with the child, or how low vision and/or hearing loss impacts learning, or how information from the Learning Media Assessment might be useful to them. Because they lack the time to familiarize themselves with the range of professional services the visually impaired student receives, most therapists focus on what they know and design their services based on their own skills.

In many instances, this works well, but in some cases it does not. For instance, sometimes a therapist will work individually with a student on fine motor skills (a medical model of service delivery), but will not teach the classroom staff how to carry over the skills or activities. Little is accomplished when activities designed by occupational and physical therapists are not carried over into the student's daily program. It has been my experience and observation that when students receive only a few hours a month of therapy, that time is best spent by having the therapist set up a program, define an activity, or make an environmental modification that can be implemented by staff who see the student every day. School therapists do want to be useful, and they make excellent collaborators once lines of communication are established and information is shared. As a parent, teacher or other interested party, you may have an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the therapist(s) on a student's team and help determine how best to use the limited time they can offer. With a commitment to cooperation and collaboration as the top priority, here are some suggestions that might help physical and occupational therapists meaningfully participate in educational programming for students with visual impairment or deafblindness:

- Make sure your therapist knows basic O & M skills, and which ones are in use with the student they serve. This can

be done by offering them written information about basic O & M skills (see suggested references at the end of this article), or the therapist could schedule a visit with the child during an O & M session. A joint visit allows the O & M instructor to demonstrate travel techniques to the therapists and share information about what the student can see, as well as providing an opportunity for therapists to share information about the student's coordination, muscle strength, endurance, etc. with the O & M instructor. This exchange of information helps to ensure that all members of the child's educational team are consistently cueing the child to travel as independently and safely as possible, and that travel expectations are within the child's physical capabilities.

- Help your therapists to incorporate their knowledge and intervention strategies into the daily routine of the student. Physical and occupational therapists are skilled at adapting activities to meet the needs of the student and know how to design activities that help develop motor and cognitive skills. However, many lack training in how to translate their knowledge into a school setting. Sometimes it just takes a suggestion from a colleague to get this kind of integrated service going. Here's an example of the kind of collaboration that works well:

A young girl with deafblindness is working on traveling an in-school route independently. She shows balance deficits when attempting to travel independently using her cane. Staff members cue her from the elbow while she walks. Peers talk to her, grab her hand and lead her from room to room, wanting to help. The physical therapist sees the child once a week for 30 minutes in a 1:1 setting in the school gym to work on strength and balance and the occupational therapist

works on fine motor skills with the child twice each six weeks.

It would not be difficult to use that exact amount of therapy time in a different way in order to maximize the effect of therapy services. Instead of pulling the child out of class for individual therapy (or in addition to individual therapy), the occupational and physical therapists could design activities that she can do with her peers at recess, that would help her with balance.

- Make sure that your therapists understand that therapy services do not always have to be individual. A good use of professional therapy services for many children with blindness and deafblindness would be to develop group gross motor activities for the student's class, adapting as needed for the visual and/or hearing impairments, and teach the classroom staff to do these activities on an ongoing basis. Using this model, the therapist can check on the motor group periodically to change and upgrade the activities. Motor groups can be run by classroom staff, physical education teachers, or anyone else who is willing and available, and they are great vehicles for teaching spatial concepts ("under," "around," "through") and language skills (requesting, moving in response to directional cues, naming and describing objects used in activities, etc.).
- Therapists can be very good at helping a student integrate into PE class with their peers. Ask your therapists to observe in the physical education class and problem-solve ways to include the student with disability. For more on that topic, see "Including Students with VI in PE," in *Re:View*, Fall 1999, vol. 31, #3.
- Remind your therapists to apply what they already know about movement and developmental skill acquisition to the student with VI. Occupational therapists may not always know what is typical in

terms of fine motor skills for students with visual impairments, but they do almost always recognize atypical muscle tone, difficulty with coordination, and tactile avoidance, and they know what to do about these problems. Physical therapists may not be aware of the gait differences, muscle tone and strength issues or other physical problems common to these students, but they do have a working knowledge of bio-mechanics and can be usefully recruited to help students in this population by simply applying what they know. Ask them to bring their clinical observation skills to the task of writing or reading Braille, or independent travel - you may be surprised how much help they can be.

- Ask a therapist to think through and modify positioning systems to maximize student performance. All therapists know positioning, which is no different for students with visual impairment or deafblindness than for other students. Adjusting positioning to accommodate for tone, posture, muscle strength, or other factors will help the student every day, for hours a day, and is well worth a therapy session. Best practice would be for a therapist to observe, evaluate, then request modifications in equipment or schedule, and check back next visit to follow-up.
- Therapists are great assets for building vestibular and/or proprioceptive activities into a student's instructional plan. Whether the problem to be addressed is difficulty in establishing independent travel or inefficient acquisition of Braille reading and writing skills, these kinds of activities can be designed as preparation for the task. Ask your therapists to think through the skill you are trying to teach, and help you generate a few minutes of appropriate motor activity.
- When it comes to functional skills training, occupational and physical therapists

may be your most valuable allies. More and more, therapists are charged with providing services aimed at functional outcomes. They are trained to facilitate maximum independent function in everything from personal care and hygiene to higher level functions like literacy or community access. If you already do an assessment of functional skills, ask your therapists for input. If not, ask your therapists to survey the student's level of functional skill and help develop goals and strategies for achieving them.

We really are all in this together: students, parents, family members, teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals, administrators. If

we keep that in mind, and invite each other into dialogue and collaboration in order to serve our students, everyone wins.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION ON O & M SKILLS

Dodson-Burk, B. and Hill, E. (1989). *An Orientation and Mobility Primer for Families and Young Children*. New York: AFB Press.

Hill, E. and Ponder, P. (1976). *Orientation and Mobility Techniques: A Guide for the Practitioner*. New York: AFB Press.

Knott, N. I. (2002). *Teaching Orientation and Mobility in the Schools: An Instructor's Companion*. New York: AFB Press.

A Brief Guide to Adaptive Equipment, or What Are Those Cool Gadgets That the OT/PT Department Gives to the Students?

By Roger Toy, OTR, and Lisa Ricketts, OTR
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Abstract: This article describes strategies and equipment that allow students with physical limitations become more independent with daily living skills.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, adaptive equipment, daily living skills, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT)

All students have different abilities and unique needs. Students who have physical disabilities in addition to sensory impairments often benefit from a variety of adaptations to routines, materials, and the environment. The following are examples of adaptive equipment and strategies that can be considered in order to help students with physical limitations be more independent with their daily living skills.

EATING SKILLS

Before considering the use of adaptive equipment to promote a student's ability to

eat independently, take a look at basic positioning. The student needs to be as close to the table as possible. This will minimize the amount of food that falls into the lap and can discourage slouching, which can interfere with swallowing.

Therapists commonly recommend that positioning follow "the rule of 90 degrees". This incorporates a 90-degree bend at the hip, a 90-degree bend at the knees, and 90 degrees of flexion at the ankle. This means that smaller students may need footstools when they eat in a school cafeteria so their feet don't dangle. This kind of accommoda-

tion might not be possible in all places, such as restaurants and outdoor settings, but it is important in school cafeterias, classrooms, and at home in order to develop independent eating skills.

ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT

Consider using some of the following materials and equipment to help promote greater independence when eating:

- Adapted plates or dishes: HiLo dish, plate (food) guard (clear or metal), a high-sided plate (regular or partitioned), or a scoop plate. Overall, these dishes are good for the visually disabled population because they give them a physical barrier to push their food up against. They are all available commercially at medical supply stores and online.
- Dycem (a brand name) can help stabilize the plate or bowl on the bottom to prevent it from sliding. It can also be used to stabilize other things, such as books, tabletop projects, etc. We have even used it to keep a child from sliding out of his chair.
- For students who have physical difficulty holding things in their hands, utensils with built-up handles (foam or manufactured “supergrip”) and hollow-handled or “cuffed” utensils may help. Hollow-handled utensils allow a helper to insert a finger into the handle to teach the correct motion of scooping.
- Adapted utensils might also work with students who have tactile or sensory deficits, coordination problems, or reduced strength. Angled spoons may help students get the food to their mouth more successfully because they require less wrist movement. Weighted utensils are good for students who need more feedback to help them grade their force when scooping food

onto the utensil or if they have tremors/unsteadiness in their hands. A rocker knife or T-shaped rocker knife can be helpful for people who have the use of only one hand.

COOKING SKILLS AND FOOD PREPARATION

Adaptive equipment can also help students develop more independence with cooking skills and food preparation, especially those who have the use of only one hand.

- Spread boards can be used to stabilize a slice of bread, so that it does not move when spreading food over it.
- Two pins on an adapted cutting board will hold food in place during cutting tasks.
- A one-handed dish scrubber can be suctioned to the bottom or side of the sink to let you wash dishes, bowls, cups, and utensils with one hand.
- The Pan Holder (suction cups) keeps the pan from turning when cooking on the stove. The suction cups don’t work as well, however, when the stove top gets hot.

DRESSING SKILLS

Students with physical or visual impairments can use adaptive equipment to dress themselves more independently.

- Individuals with limited functional reach to their lower extremities can use a long-handled shoehorn to independently put on and take off their shoes.
- For students who cannot tie their shoelaces because of physical or cognitive limitations, elastic shoelaces are an option, as are shoes with Velcro closures. Elastic laces turn regular laced shoes into slip-on shoes by letting the tongue of the shoe stretch to accommodate the foot. They come in two different

types, "Spyrolaces" for younger children, and "Tylastic" (which look like regular shoelaces) for older students who want to look more age appropriate.

- Reachers work well for an individual in a wheelchair who has some vision. The reacher lets the person pick up items that have dropped on the floor.
- For some individuals with limited functional reach to their lower extremities, a dressing stick makes putting on and removing socks or pants simpler. Most of the dressing sticks can also be used as a shoehorn, but they may not be as comfortable for this use as the metal shoehorns.
- For individuals who cannot bend down to touch their toes, the sock aid can help them get the sock over their foot (some coordination is necessary and some vision helps).
- For the students who lack fine motor coordination or who have the use of only one hand, a button hook or a zipper pull might be useful.
- Velcro adaptations can be made on clothing for individuals that have difficulty with fasteners, such as those often found on pants.
- Some students at TSBVI use a device known as a Dressing Bar. A student in a wheelchair that has upper body strength and some coordination in his hands can use the dressing bar to pull to standing and then pull his pants/underwear up or down by himself. Students who have less upper body strength or coordination skills can hold onto the dressing bar while being assisted with their pants/underwear.
- The Flipfold is a 4-panel device that can assist students with folding shirts, pants, and towels.

HYGIENE/BATHING SKILLS

- The foam described above for use with eating utensils can also be used on other things, such as toothbrushes, razors, hairbrushes, and pens.
- Toothpaste dispensers can help individuals with limited finger/hand function or visual impairments put the correct amount of toothpaste on their toothbrush. The main drawbacks to these dispensers are the price (they can be rather expensive) and they only work with Aqua-Fresh 4.3- or 4.6-oz pump toothpaste.
- Spray-can extenders can help people with decreased movement, control, or strength in their fingers.
- There are also soap dispensers with single (like the ones you see in the public restrooms) and multiple containers that can be mounted in the shower/bathtub area for easier access for people with limited hand function or use of only one working hand. The drawbacks are that the dispensers that require drilling (for mounting on the wall) might not be possible in some bathrooms, and the dispensers held by adhesives might not hold well.
- Long-handled sponges allow people with limited reach to wash their backs, lower legs, and feet.

These are only some of the many adaptive devices that are available. The purpose of this article is not to make you an adaptive equipment expert, but to give you a quick look at things that might help the students you work with. If you feel that a student could benefit from adaptive equipment, please contact an occupational or physical therapist in your district or contact us at TSBVI.

Celebrating 75 Years of Service to Blind Texans

By Barbara J. Madrigal, Assistant Commissioner, DBS

Abstract: Commissioner Madrigal, upon the celebration of 75 years of services, reviews the history of services to Texans who are blind and anticipates future years of service.

Key Words: DARS Division for Blind Services, anniversary, Commissioner Barbara Madrigal, vocational rehabilitation, employment, blindness, News & Views

On October 17, 2006, DARS Division for Blind Services proudly celebrated 75 years of quality services to blind, visually impaired, and deafblind Texans of all ages. Joining us at this memorable event were some prominent members from various organizations, including TSBVI Superintendent Phil Hatlen.

Services for blind Texans began when the State Legislature authorized the first appropriation for home teachers for the blind. Today, we feel justifiably proud when we look back over our evolution into an organization that provides highly sophisticated vocational rehabilitation and independent living services for blind Texans of all ages and all circumstances.

It is our sincere hope that this year's important milestone will also help recognize the dedication of the many diligent staff who work in partnership with our consumers. This dedication reflects their personal belief that Texans who are blind or visually impaired should have the same opportunities as other Texans to pursue independence and employment.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The history of our organization reflects the long-term dedication of our staff as well as our continuous efforts to improve the services we offer.

- *1930s and 1940s:* Vocational rehabilitation for blind Texans was moved from the Texas Department of Education to

the new State Commission for the Blind, and the legislature appropriated funds for sight conservation and prevention of blindness in children.

- *1950s and 1960s:* We increased our focus on employment opportunities, worked with employers to increase the types of jobs available to blind Texans, received legislative authorization to establish what we know today as the Business Enterprises of Texas program, and expanded services to blind Texas children.
- *1970s:* The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center opened in Austin. We were among the first state agencies to install a toll-free line to enhance consumer access, we established consumer advisory committees across the state to encourage consumer involvement in developing and improving program services, and we received one of five national grants to demonstrate a model for enhanced Independent Living services for people who are blind or visually impaired.
- *1980s and 1990s:* The Texas Commission for the Blind adopted an agency-wide "consumer as partner" philosophy to enhance service delivery and improve outcomes for blind and visually impaired Texans. An innovative Transition Program was established to bridge the gap between children's services and adult services, and we received a federal grant to provide Independent Living services to older Texans with visual disabilities.

THE CURRENT DECADE

In the current decade, change has been our constant companion. Consolidation and budget considerations have been primary concerns, but we are moving toward the future with full enthusiasm.

VR counselors and teachers in our Vocational Rehabilitation Program assist blind Texans to reach their independent living and employment goals, and we have initiated a comprehensive review of our employment-related services to ensure DBS continues to provide the highest possible level of effective services to Texans seeking productive, gainful employment.

Our Deafblind Program celebrated 15 successful years of a unique program to assist deafblind consumers to live independently in their own apartments and, in 2006, the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center marked 35 years of services to blind Texans while continuing to receive national recognition as a model program for comprehensive services.

Business Enterprises of Texas (BET) is nationally recognized for successful development of quality employment opportunities for blind Texans in the food service and vending industries.

Our Transition Program bridges the gap between the Blind Children's program and adult Vocational Rehabilitation services, ensures a seamless service delivery system through each stage of the young person's development, and assists Texas youth who are blind or visually impaired to make an effective transition from secondary school to adult life and the world of work.

The Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program provides a wide range of habilitation services to meet each child's unique needs and circumstances and to ensure our youngest Texans acquire independent, productive, and satisfying lives.

The Independent Living Program provides much needed services to older blind adults—a segment of our population that continues to grow as more older Texans experience vision loss -- to help them acquire the adaptive skills necessary to live independently.

Critical support functions such as Employment Assistance Services, our Vocational Diagnostic Unit, and our Braille Unit support our programs statewide. And our Blindness Training & Development Unit continues to be recognized for its outstanding training programs.

The Future

Through strong partnerships with consumer and advocacy groups as well as organizations such as the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the DARS Division for Blind Services maintains active relationships with the blind community to encourage critical input about our services and ways we can improve, and the Texas Confidence Builders philosophy remains at the heart of our service delivery system: consumer independence, competence, and self-confidence. These foundations will serve us well as we continually strive to enhance services.

As we move forward into the new century, we maintain a strong and efficient service delivery system for consumers of all ages -- children, students and young adults, working-age adults, and older Texans -- and staff members in all program areas remain career oriented and committed to providing legendary customer services. Consumer surveys rank DBS staff and DBS services very high, and our organization continues to be recognized at the national level as a premier agency for blind services.

Equally important, DBS is taking steps within our organizational structure to ensure the future continuation of quality, seamless services for blind Texans by establishing a new FUTURES initiative that offers career

ladder opportunities for eligible staff while encouraging them to be forward thinking and innovative.

We are proud to celebrate 75 years of quality services to blind and visually im-

paired Texans, and we're looking forward to many, many more. We're already off to a great start in fiscal year 2007 -- and we're ready to start planning our future 100th celebration!

We Turn a Shovel by June

By Phil Hatlen, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: Dr. Hatlen describes the new construction planned for TSBVI.

Key Words: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, TSBVI, Superintendent Phil Hatlen, blindness, renovation, Texas Building and Procurement Commission, TBPC, News & Views

During the 2005 legislative session, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) was provided \$36,500,000 in revenue bond funds for campus renovation and construction. In typical bureaucratic fashion, it will have taken almost two years before we break ground on the new construction. In the meantime, the Texas Building and Procurement Commission (TBPC) has assumed administrative responsibility for the renovation and construction project. An architectural firm has been employed, and they have spent many hours working closely with TSBVI staff and our TBPC liaison to design the new buildings.

What began as a plan for eight specific projects has transitioned into something quite different. I'll try to explain the results of intensive investigation into the eight projects, and the outcome that will significantly transform our campus.

I'll begin by reviewing for you our current status. As you view the TSBVI campus with 45th Street at your back, you see a large classroom building in the middle, flanked by three smaller buildings on each side. These seven buildings, plus "Dorm K" further north on campus, were all built in 1916. The smaller buildings on each side

of the classroom building and Dorm K were originally dormitories where students lived. The three on the East side of the classroom building were renovated about ten years ago, and continue to be used as dormitories. On the West side, the building closest to 45th Street now houses the TSBVI Museum and a few guest rooms. The next building is used solely for offices, and the third building is currently vacant. These 90-year-old buildings have served students well over the years, and should now be replaced. However, the passage of two years and the rising costs of construction have taken their toll on the \$36.5 million, and we have had to revise plans considerably.

As some of you may know, we built five new student housing facilities two years ago. We're very pleased with these new facilities, as they are both student-friendly and relatively easy to supervise. By June we will break ground on another similar building that will be located on the East side of our campus. Currently, a number of "Independent Living Houses" are being removed from that location. The timing of the construction of this student housing building will coincide with that of a new fourplex on the northern edge of our campus, which will displace some Sunshine Commu-

nity Gardens plots. We estimate that these two buildings will be ready for occupancy around November 2007.

In the northwest corner of the TSBVI campus is a dormitory called the Elementary Complex. This building is slated for demolition and replacement, beginning in June 2007. Not scheduled, but hopefully occurring soon thereafter, will be construction of a new main classroom building to be located where the parking lot lies in front of the current main classroom building. We will retain use of the current building while the new one is under construction, then demolish it. Concurrent with this will be con-

struction of a new dining hall, natatorium, and fine arts building, located in the general vicinity of the current natatorium, pavilion, and basketball court.

These projects will stretch available funds to the maximum. However, they are part of a "Master Plan" created by the architects in consultation with TSBVI. This Master Plan would transform the entire campus, and its realization would result in a very beautiful school. We are going back to the legislature this year to request additional revenue bond funding, so that we may implement the remaining projects included in the Master Plan.

IDEA 2004 Dedicated Website and Regulations Released

Press release from Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
and Office of Special Education Programs

Abstract: John H. Hager, assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and Alexa Posny, director of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), at the U.S. Department of Education, are pleased to announce a dedicated Web site to provide a "one-stop shop" for resources related to IDEA 2004 and its implementing regulations.

Key Words: IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, regulations, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, OSERS, Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, No Child Left Behind, NCLB, technical assistance

On Aug. 3, 2006, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced the release of the final Part B regulations implementing the 2004 reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These regulations were published in the Federal Register on Aug. 14, 2006. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) has planned numerous activities and events to support the successful implementation of these regulations.

Central to this technical assistance is a dedicated Web site. OSERS created this site to provide a "one-stop shop" for resources related to IDEA and its implementing regu-

lations. The site provides searchable versions of the statute and regulations, as well as, access to cross-referenced content from other laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The site also includes topic briefs on selected topics (topics are being developed); links to OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination (TA and D) Network; and a variety of other information sources. The site also has a "Q-and-A Corner" for questions to be submitted.

Alexa Posny, director of OSERS Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), officially launched the new Web site: <http://idea>.

ed.gov at OSEP's annual Leadership Conference in Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. More than 700 state directors of special education and other state personnel, parent training center directors, technical assistance providers and representatives from the disability community gathered to receive information about the final regulations and resources

available to assist with implementation of the regulations.

This is a "living" Web site and will change and grow as additional resources and information become available. We invite you to grow and learn with us as we implement IDEA 2004 and its implementing regulations.

The United States Association of Blind Athletes

By Sarah K. Bradley, USABA

Abstract: this article reviews the history of the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA), discusses benefits of athletic participation, and provides USABA contact information.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, United States Association of Blind Athletes, USABA, sports, sports camps, International Blind Sports Association Youth, Student World Games

The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) is a community based organization of the United States Olympic Committee and serves individuals who are blind or visually impaired across the United States. Our vision is a world in which all individuals who are blind or visually impaired have the opportunity to discover their athletic potential and pursue their athletic dreams.

USABA emerged in 1976 when a group of individuals met at the Olympics for the Disabled in Toronto, Ontario, to discuss their vision of the future of sport for athletes with visual impairments. In the beginning, founder Arthur Copeland ran the organization from his kitchen table on a shoe string budget in Beach Haven, New Jersey. Since then, USABA has evolved into a national organization that provides sports opportunities in eleven sports which impact the lives of more than 2,000 athletes of all ages and abilities each year and has reached more than 100,000 individuals in its 30 years of operation. The organization has emerged

as more than just a world-class trainer of blind athletes, it has become a champion of the abilities of Americans who are legally blind. In fact, USABA athletes have served as U.S. Olympic Team members and won medals against sighted competitors. This past summer, USABA had thirty-four of its athletes compete in the 2006 Rocky Mountain State Games, the first state games in the nation to fully integrate athletes who are blind and visually impaired into competition. More than 25 medals were earned by USABA athletes from the ages of 7 through adult who were able to showcase their talents and abilities in a competition with more than 5,000 competitors.

SPORTS EDUCATION CAMPS

Each summer, USABA chapters around the country hold Sports Education Camps for youth ages 5-18. The first Sports Education Camp (SEC) took place in 1988 after a group of adult athletes with visual impairments identified the problem within physical education and sports for children with

visual impairments. Their goal was to teach youth with visual impairments basic sports skills and activities, increase the knowledge of parents, teachers and the community regarding adaptations required for participation, and in turn increase access to physical education, sports and recreation for people with visual impairments. Today, SEC's take place in ten different states around the country, each summer offering youth the opportunity to participate in a variety of sports and recreation activities, including judo, cycling, track & field, swimming, wrestling, goalball, gymnastics, bowling, and rock climbing. Paralympic athletes and elite coaches are involved in these residential programs.

Through an affiliation with Western Michigan University, research has been conducted concerning the outcomes from these camps. The research done at the SEC's has shown that skills learned at the camps have had a continuing positive impact on the lives of these participating young athletes. In fact, more than 45% of students who attended sports camp for two consecutive years participated on their home school sports teams. In addition, 80% of these youth participated in their school physical education programs, compared to 27% of blind and visually impaired youth overall. Research has also shown that participants have also learned how to adapt sports to their needs in a school or extracurricular setting, creating an advocate within the child.

The following are SEC dates for Summer 2007. You can also find this information on our website at <www.usaba.org>.

- Michigan Sports Education Junior Camp. May 6-8; Kalamazoo, Michigan. Contact: Paul Ponchillia <paul.ponchillia@wmich.edu>.
- Michigan Sports Education Senior Camp. May 9-12; Kalamazoo, Michigan. Contact: Paul Ponchillia <paul.ponchillia@wmich.edu>.

- North East Blind Athletic Association. May 23-26; Orno, Maine. Contact: Mark Sinclair <nebaa03@aol.com>
- Lakeshore Sports Education Camp. May 31-June 4; Birmingham, Alabama. Contact: Jennifer Armbruster <jena@lakeshore.org>.
- Camp Abilities Tucson. June 3-9; Tucson, Arizona. Contact: Megan O'Connell <campabilitiestuscon@cox.net>.
- Colorado Sports Education Camp. June 17-22; Colorado Springs, Colorado. Contact: Donna Keale <dkeale@cldb.org>.
- Wisconsin Junior Sports Camp. June 22-24; Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Contact: Patrick Gafney <pgafney@wi.rr.com>.
- Wisconsin Senior Sports Camp. June 26-30; Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Contact: Patrick Gafney <pgafney@wi.rr.com>.
- Wisconsin 5-8 Year Olds and Parents Sports Camp. June 29-30; Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Contact: Patrick Gafney <pgafney@wi.rr.com>.
- Camp LIFE. July 7-14; Denton, Texas. Contact: Vicki Mason-Foederer <vicki22ape@msn.com>.
- Camp Inter-Actions. July 7-20; New Durham, New Hampshire. Contact: Debbie Gross <inter-actions@mindspring.com>
- Sports Education Camp. July 9-14; Anchorage, Alaska. Contact: Margaret Webber <alpinealternatives@artic.net>.
- Utah Foundation for the Blind and Visually Impaired. July 29-August 3; Salt Lake City, Utah. Contact: Tony Jepson <tony@ufbvi.org>.

IBSA YOUTH AND STUDENT WORLD GAMES

USABA will be playing host to the 2007 International Blind Sports Association Youth

and Student World Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado July 11-17. Young athletes from around the world will compete in five sports for blind and visually impaired youth, ages 12-19. Competition will be held in track & field, judo, swimming, powerlifting and goalball. These Games will take place at the athletic facilities at Colorado College.

In 2005, USABA had the privilege of hosting more than 250 athletes from 26 countries in the World Youth Championships, which were also held in Colorado Springs. "USABA is honored to once again host this prestigious event and showcase the best young blind and visually impaired athletes from around the world in world competition," stated Kevin Szott, USABA Board President. "These games will serve as a springboard for other international competition for these young athletes, including future Paralympic Games." More than 100 countries have been invited to participate and twenty four of these countries with delegations from Europe, Asia, South America, North America, Australia and Africa having already committed to send competitors. For more informa-

tion on these games, visit <www.usaba.org> or contact USABA at <media@usaba.org>.

USABA strives to become the premier provider of sport opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired. "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own." (Benjamin Disraeli) USABA strives to make possible for all individuals who are blind and visually impaired the opportunity to discover their true potential and overcome obstacles and identifying their abilities. With the growth of self confidence, leadership, poise and determination that sport provides, these athletes can become advocates for themselves, role models for others, and help to break down the stereotypes that follow "disability." As our U.S. Paralympic teams continue to train every day for the honor to represent Team U.S.A. in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, USABA also continues to support young athletes who are blind and visually impaired in order for them to reach their full potential, their athletic goals, and their dreams!

Announcing For New Parents – You and Your Baby

DB-LINK announcement

Abstract: DB-Link announces a new page entitled "For New Parents – You and Your Baby," that provides information and resources that will assist parents in adjusting to life with a new baby.

Key Words: DB-LINK, I & R, deafblind, News & Views

DB-LINK announces their newest page entitled "For New Parents – You and Your Baby," that provides information and resources to assist parents in adjusting to life with a new baby. Caring for an infant who has both a hearing loss and visual impairment can be a challenging experience. The links on this page will connect parents to a

wealth of information and knowledge that will help you in caring for everyone in the family. Check it out at <http://www.dblink.org/baby.htm>.

DB-LINK also has all of their publications on a CD-Rom as well as newly designed magnets that are a big hit!!

Publishers Launch Look-Up Service to Speed Delivery of Course Materials to Print-Disabled Students

Press Release from the Association of American Publishers (AAP)

Abstract: this article discusses the release of an online database that will allow Disabled Student Services to seek text materials in alternate formats.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, Association of American Publishers, braille, Disability Support Services, Alternative Formats Solutions Initiative, News & Views

Washington, D.C. (August 22, 2006) -- Higher education publisher members of the Association of American Publishers (AAP) today launched a beta version of a Publisher Look-Up Service. The online search tool, found at <http://www.publisherlookup.org/>, will enable Disabled Student Services (DSS) professionals who are seeking text materials in alternate formats for print-disabled students to more easily contact publishers.

The Publisher Look-Up Service is a first step in AAP's Alternative Formats Solutions Initiative (AFSI), a national effort to identify ways to provide print-disabled post-secondary students with specially formatted course materials on a timely basis. AFSI research showed that publishers could make an immediate difference by launching the Publisher Look-Up Service, while still exploring longer-term solutions.

"The Association of American Publishers heard repeatedly that DSS professionals can have a tough time figuring out whom to contact at a particular publishing house to request either an electronic format of a textbook or permission to scan that book in order to produce e-text. In response, AAP built the Publisher Look-Up Service, a Web site interface to help DSS professionals search for e-text and permissions contacts at college textbook publishing companies," said Ed McCoyd, AAP's director of digital policy.

DSS offices at post-secondary institutions can search by textbook publisher or pub-

lisher imprint to access general information about the publishing company and appropriate contact information. Once provided with this information, DSS offices typically work with publishers to acquire an electronic version of a textbook to provide to print-disabled students.

"We believe the Look-Up Service is a step in the right direction. Active participation by publishers and DSS professionals will make this beta launch a success, enabling us to enhance and improve the Look-Up Service with publisher-supplied data and user feedback. Our ultimate goal is to have completely accurate, up-to-date information on the site for the spring 2007 semester," McCoyd said.

Publishers—AAP members and non-members—are encouraged to secure a login from AAP that enables them to directly upload, edit, and update company information on the site. To request a login, write highered@publishers.org.

About AAP's Alternative Formats Solutions Initiative (AFSI): The Alternative Formats Solutions Initiative is a publisher-funded research project that involves colleges and universities, students, disabled students support services professionals, national and state disability advocacy groups, and technology providers in an effort to create a national framework of specific, practical solutions. The AAP-led program, which began in March 2006, is assessing problems faced by print-disabled students, including delays

in getting their materials or the inability to receive the proper materials at all.

AAP members were active participants in a federal solution for students in grades K-12, supporting the development and passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004. Building on that collaborative effort, the Association and its higher education publishers initiated their post-secondary efforts in April 2005 at a meeting of stakeholders in Washington, D.C. In December 2005, AAP hosted a meeting held by the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) with publishers, college and university personnel, and other advocacy groups to gather input on how to move the process forward.

At this meeting, AHEAD's E-text Solutions Group identified the Look-Up Service as a priority.

About the Association of American Publishers: The Association of American Publishers is the national trade association of the U.S. book publishing industry. AAP's more than 300 members include most of the major commercial book publishers in the United States, as well as smaller and non-profit publishers, university presses and scholarly societies. AAP members publish hardcover and paperback books in every field, educational materials for the elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and professional markets, scholarly journals, computer software, and electronic products and services.

Hadley Opens Online Discussion Board!

Press Release, Hadley School for the Blind

Abstract: this press release announces an online forum for students and visitors

Key Words: Hadley School for the Blind, forum, blindness, visual impairment

The Hadley School for the Blind has created a new and exciting online forum for visitors to the Hadley Web site to connect with one another. This will allow not only visitors but also Hadley students in all 50 states and 100 countries, who otherwise would not have met, to associate with each other as well as ask questions of Hadley staff.

The new online discussion board went live Thursday, September 15th. Visitors to the Hadley Web site will be able to join discussions by simply registering with a valid email address. Go to www.hadley.edu and activate the "Forums" link to reach the Hadley Discussion Board. Follow the "Register" link to join the forums.

"Hadley students have been asking for a means through which they can communicate with each other," said Hadley Interim

President Dawn Turco. "Our new discussion board does this and more, as it allows for interaction with others, worldwide."

Moderated by school staff, the online discussion board offers five forums: braille; technology; professionals; families; and general inquiries.

The Hadley School for the Blind is one of the largest worldwide educators of blind and visually impaired people. Since its founding by William Hadley and Dr. E.V.L. Brown in 1920, all of Hadley's distance education courses have been provided free of charge. Today, the school serves over 10,000 students annually in all 50 states and 100 countries. Hadley relies on contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations to fund its programs. Visit us on the Web at www.hadley.edu.

BulletinBoard

Announcements / Regional, State, and National Training and Events

Mail or email your item 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>>



Texas Focus 2007

**The World on a String:
Connecting through the Expanded Core Curriculum**

**Main Conference Events
June 19th and 20th**

Hilton San Antonio Airport - San Antonio, TX

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Phil Hatlen

The 2007 Texas Focus will offer a variety of speakers and topics related to
the Expanded Core Curriculum

June 18th Special Pre-Conference

For Parents:

Assessment for the VI Student: What a Parent Should Know
With Marnee Loftin, Psychologist, TSBVI

Advocating for Appropriate VI Programming and Services
With Shawna Tausch, Reg. Coord., Partners Resource Network

For Professionals:

Effective Instructional Practice for the Expanded Core Curriculum Content Areas
With Dr. Karen Blankenship, National Agenda Co-Chair

Registration materials on-line at <www.tsbvi.edu>
Registration ends on June 1st so don't delay!

For more information, contact:
Kate Moss at (512) 206-9224 or <KateMoss@tsbvi.edu>;
or Paula Effenger at (512) 206-9344 or <PaulaEffenger@tsbvi.edu>

INSITE Training – Part 2

**May 22- 24
Austin, Texas**

Contact: Gigi Newton TSBVI Outreach
512-206-9272
or
<giginewton@tsbvi.edu>

2007 USABA National Goalball Championships

May 31 - June 2
St. Augustine, FL

2007 IBSA World Youth and Student Games

July 11–16
Colorado Springs, CO

Contact: John Potts
<jpotts@usaba.org>
<www.usaba.org/home.html>

Making a Difference: Parents and Patients in the Know

The 5th Alström Syndrome International Conference

May 25-28, 2007

**Green Oaks Hotel
Fort Worth, Texas, USA**

For Patients, Families, & Professionals

Medical and emotional strategies
for fighting back!!
Delaying, Moderating, Treating, and
Managing Alström Syndrome

Registration fee for meals
and activities: \$100 per person

For more information:
Robin Marshall
Executive Director
(207) 244-7043
<robin@acadia.net>

Sandra M. Surette
Family Services Coordinator
(902) 648-2143
<asisandra@eastlink.ca>
<www.jax.org/alstrom>

CHARGE TO THE WEST !!!

The 8th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference

July 27th - July 29th, 2007

Costa Mesa California
Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa

Childcare provided during the meetings
on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
for all children who have registered.

You are urged to register early.
Registrations received after June 15
will be subject to a late fee of \$50.

Absolutely no registrations will be
accepted after June 30.

The CHARGE Syndrome Foundation
2004 Parkade Blvd
Columbia, MO 65202-3121
800-442-7604
<info@chargesyndrome.org>
<www.chargesyndrome.org>

**3rd Annual Texas
Parent to Parent Conference**

**Creating a Good Life
for Our Children**

**Omni Austin Hotel, Southpark, Austin
Friday & Saturday, June 8th-9th**

Pre-Conference: Thursday, June 7th
Pete & Pam Wright of Wrightslaw

Accessing SSI & Medicaid for Students with
Disabilities: Opportunities for Self-Support
with Daniel Scarborough

Interest-Based Problem-Solving or How
Not to Get Stuck in Conflict with Schools
with Laura Otey

Texas Parent to Parent
Toll free: 866-896-6001
Austin: 458-8600
< www.txp2p.org>

**National Federation of the Blind
2007 National Convention**

June 30 - July 6
Marriott Marquis Hotel
Atlanta, GA

Pre-register online or by mail by May 31st.

Preconvention seminars for parents of
blind children will take place on June 30.

During convention week, children
six weeks – ten years of age are invited to
join in the fun and festivities of NFB Camp.
Pre-registration on or before June 15th is
required. Space is limited.

For additional information contact:
National Federation of the Blind
Phone: (410) 659-9314
<www.nfb.org/nfb/national_convention_2007.asp>

**Families Connecting
with Families**

**National Association for
Parents of Children with
Visual Impairments (NAPVI)
Conference 2007**

July 13-15, 2007
Hilton Omaha
Omaha, Nebraska

NAPVI is partnering with the
American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)
and The Seeing Eye to bring parents a
national conference covering all aspects
of raising and educating a child
with a visual impairment.

Conference will include:

- Interactive sessions & panel discussions
- Networking with families & professionals
- Daycare for children
- Activities designed especially for teens
- Fun for the whole family

Contact NAPVI
<www.napvi.org>
or

Visit AFB's website to register online,
learn more about the conference,
and download conference brochures:
<www.afb.org>

**2007 American Council of the
Blind Convention**

June 30-July 7
Minneapolis, Minn.,
Hyatt Regency and the Millennium

For questions about the convention, or to
discuss arrangements, contact:
Carla Ruschival at (502) 897-1472,
or e-mail <adamcarla@bellsouth.net>

Seabeck - 2007 29th Deaf-Blind Retreat Camp

August 26 - September 1
Seabeck Conference Center
Seabeck, Washington

Contact Jeane Arnold or Tami Berk
(206) 322-4200
TTY: (206) 436-2231

ASSETS 2007

**Ninth International ACM SIGACCESS
Conference on Computers
and Accessibility**

October 14 - 17
Tempe, AZ

The conference program is aimed at providing a technical forum for presenting and disseminating innovative research results that address the use of computing and information technologies to help persons with disabilities.

Sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the SIGACCESS Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing.

Contact: Enrico Pontelli
<epontell@cs.nmsu.edu>

<www.acm.org/sigaccess/assets07>

Getting In Touch With Literacy

November 29 - December 2
St. Pete Beach, Florida

Contact:
Phone: (813) 837-7829
E-Mail: <kratzlaff@fimcivi.org>
<www.fimcivi.org/index_files.cfm?category=31>

2007 Seminar Calendar National Training Team Helen Keller National Center

May 21 - 25, 2007

"Same but Different"

Orientation & Mobility Techniques for
Deaf-Blind Travelers

July 23 - 27, 2007

"Touching Lives"

Interpreting Techniques for the
Deaf-Blind Population

September 17 - 21, 2007

"The Best is Yet to Come"

Enhancing Services for Older Adults with
Vision & Hearing Loss

October 15 - 19, 2007

"Transformation"

Person Centered Approach to Habilitation

December 3 - 7, 2007

"The Magic of Technology"

Technology Seminar

All seminars are held at the Helen Keller
National Center, Sands Point, NY

Cost of week-long seminars - \$450
(includes lodging, meals, training and
training manual)

For further information please contact:

National Training Team
Helen Keller National Center
141 Middle Neck Road
Sands Point, NY 11050

Phone: (516) 944-8900 Ext. 233
TTY: (516) 944-8637
e-mail: <ntthknc@aol.com>

Register on-line at our website:
<www.hknc.org>

TX SenseAbilities

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