Summer Program Report
Academic Secondary Enrichment
Camp Challenge

Student:
Dates: June 16-21, 2013
Teachers: Scott Baltisberger and Tad Doezema

Program Overview

The Academic Secondary Enrichment (ASE) classes are designed for middle and high school academic students. These students work hard in school to learn regular core curriculum subjects such as language arts and math in classrooms with their sighted peers. In TSBVI summer programs, they have the opportunity to practice these academic skills within meaningful, high-interest activities. At the same time, they learn and practice skills in the Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Students (ECC). The ECC includes skills that are unique to the needs of students with visual impairments. ECC skills enhance an individual’s ability to access the regular core curriculum, live independently, and enjoy social and recreational activities. Skills in the ECC include compensatory academic skills (e.g., Braille and tactile graphics), orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, assistive technology skills, sensory efficiency skills, and self-determination skills.

Each ASE class has a unique theme, and students participate in a wide variety of activities related to the theme of their class. During these activities, students learn and practice specific ECC skills such as applying math and literacy skills when creating and following a budget), food shopping and preparation, managing and organizing their living area, planning and evaluating a project, using public transportation, keeping up with belongings, and using technology for various purposes including research and communication with family and friends.

An additional benefit of the program is the opportunity to interact with other students with visual impairments. For many, talking with other students about the challenges they face at home and school may both alleviate feelings of isolation and increase self-confidence.

The ASE classes taught during the summer of 2013 were: Camp Challenge, Camp Fine Arts, Catching Some Rays: Space Weather, Community Independence, Adventure/Outdoor
DESCRIPTION OF CLASS: Camp Challenge
Camp Challenge was designed to offer an opportunity for students to undertake a variety of mental and physical challenges through activities which may not be available to them during their regular school-year program. This year’s activities included: rock climbing, stand-up paddling, self-defense, ropes challenge course, camping, zip lining, circus arts, spelunking, flying small aircraft, canoeing and a community give-back activity, working to clean a lake area.

Camp Challenge focused on the Expanded Core Curriculum skills of self-determination and social interaction. Other areas of the ECC were also infused throughout the activities. Our guiding philosophy was to provide experiences which enhance and develop self-awareness, self-confidence and interpersonal communication skills, so participants could acquire abilities and outlooks they might apply across a wide spectrum of lifelong learning.

Within each activity, everyone was encouraged to assess their areas of personal strength and need and set a goal for themselves. Techniques for addressing and reducing stress were reviewed by the group and potential strategies presented. Once the activity was completed, an additional discussion took place in which everyone could assess their progress toward their goals and identify what techniques and strategies had best served them. This process increases self-awareness and gives participants good tools for managing future challenges in life.

Another major goal of Camp Challenge was to enhance interpersonal communication skills. During all activities, it was paramount that participants engaged in appropriate and effective interactions with peers and adults. As individuals, it was necessary to attend to instructions and to communicate understanding to ensure that one understood the nature of each challenge and express their personal needs. In addition, teamwork and team accomplishment were stressed. We explored the concepts of group dynamics and group communication and sought to endow everyone with a better understanding of how to work effectively within these situations.

ACTIVITIES
Sunday
- Students arrived on campus with their families and, after bidding them goodbye, travelled to the dormitory that would be their base camp for all the coming week’s undertakings. Each individual was shown their room and oriented to the new environment. They were also introduced to the TSBVI staff and fellow campers with whom they would soon be sharing many challenges. The first activity was a swim test at the campus pool to ensure that everyone would be safe for our many water-based exploits. After this, the entire group met to discuss our itinerary and go over rules and standards for the camp. We also introduced an overview of the self-determination curriculum that is at the heart of Camp Challenge, including the concepts of goal-setting, managing stress, identifying strengths and needs, identifying supports and resources, teamwork and locus of control. With preliminary training out of the way, everyone turned in early to rest up for a week of non-stop adventure.

Monday
- Ropes Course: This day started with the group travelling to Boerne to take advantage of the Don Strange Ropes Course. There were two components to the event. First were the
"low elements," in which the group needed to work together in order to solve a variety of mental challenges. Group dynamics and communications were discussed during this portion. The second part of the day involved the "high elements," which took place 30 to 40 feet above the ground. Individuals needed to solve their own challenges during these events but also relied on group support and feedback.

- **Camping:** After the ropes course, the group headed to Guadalupe River State Park. Upon arrival at the park, the majority of the students paired up to set up their tents. Teamwork and communication were essential during this activity. Students who had experience or understood the process of setting up a tent were quick to step in and help those who were struggling. Students were instructed in fire safety and techniques for building a campfire. Staff provided information regarding environmental issues and safety related to the area. A few of the students volunteered to help prepare a dinner of hamburgers and hot dogs over the fire. Once the camp was set up and dinner was eaten, the students sat around the fire and sang, socialized, and shared stories and experiences from the week.

**Tuesday**

- **Circus Arts:** After preparing breakfast and striking camp, the group headed back to Austin where we met a group from “Sky Candy” for instruction in circus arts. This included aerial and floor gymnastics, hula hooping, and magic. Gymnastics required a considerable amount of work on strength, balance, and motor planning, as well as working as a team. Hula hooping and magic, while not as physically taxing, called for following directions and perseverance in order to be successful.

- **Spelunking:** From Sky Candy, we traveled to "Whirlpool Cave" in South Austin. This natural feature is an undeveloped cavern, accessible only with permission from the Austin Watershed Commission. Volunteers from the University of Texas Grotto (a local caving group) met us and provided the needed equipment, guidance and instruction to undertake the challenge. For two hours, we crawled, slithered, climbed and squeezed through muddy, dark passageways some fifty feet beneath the earth's surface. Dealing with this new terrain and navigating unusual mobility problems was quite an undertaking, in addition to learning how to manage our varying levels of claustrophobia. Luckily, our guides proved more than up to the task, and everyone made it through the cavern. Afterwards, many expressed that it was the most daunting, but also the most rewarding, experience.

**Wednesday**

- **Zip lining:** Wednesday morning we drove to Lake Travis Zipline Adventures. We divided into two groups and were taken by van and boat to an amazing zipline course over Lake Travis. The students put on harnesses, helmets, and gloves and, after an initial training, were clipped on to a zip line and “zipped” on three lines, two of which are among the longest in Texas. Many students expressed initial fear and apprehension leading up to this event. They encouraged each other throughout. All were able to face their fears and complete this activity. The smiles on their faces during and after their “zips” were priceless.

- **Canoeing and Lake Clean-up:** No time to rest at this point! From the zipline, the group traveled to Zilker Park in Central Austin where watercraft, courtesy of Zilker Park Canoe Rentals, awaited us. Students broke into pairs, and after a short on-land tutorial, headed into the water. Maneuvering a kayak with two persons required communication and teamwork, requiring the crew of each boat to problem-solve how best to work together. We met the challenge with varying levels of finesse, and all were able to make it on to Ladybird...
Lake and explore the river environment. The purpose of this trip was not only to learn canoe skills but also to give back to the Austin community by removing debris from the lake. Learning that they are a part a larger community is essential for these young adults as they move towards adulthood.

Thursday
- Air Challenge: After breakfast and a drive to Cedar Park, students were encouraged to stay strong and fully engaged in the “once in a lifetime” experience they were about to have. We were escorted to a beautiful home that included a hangar where a group of small plane pilots and their families were waiting for us. After a hands-on tour of a 72 year old plane, the students were taken up in one of three single engine planes. Once in the air, those that chose to were able to take over the controls of the plane. Once again, the students faced their fears and apprehensions and took full advantage of this opportunity.

- Stand-up paddling: Our next stop was the "Expedition School" where we were introduced to the sport of stand-up paddling. This sport can be quite difficult, as it requires a significant degree of balance and coordination. It was important for everyone to listen carefully and follow the directions of our instructors in order to complete the task successfully.

- Jiu-jitsu: After dinner, we headed to our on-campus gym where we were met by a large group from Vandry Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. After an introduction and instructions from Jiu-Jitsu artist Professor William Vandry, this group of Jiu-Jitsu artists provided one-on-one self-defense instruction to the students. The students learned a number of challenging self-defense strategies and moves. Upon conclusion of the lesson, Professor William shared with the group that he, too, is visually impaired. He shared portions of his life story and his accomplishments, not the least of which is running a successful Jiu-Jitsu school, and encouraged the students that, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

Friday
- After breakfast on Friday, the students had the opportunity to express their appreciation to the individuals and organizations that had provided them with the numerous opportunities for growth they had been given throughout the week. The students collaborated to design and create thank you cards for each of our hosts. This activity allowed the students to exercise their creativity and allowed us to address the concepts of appreciation and reciprocity.

- Parents arrived at lunchtime and we all gathered for lunch and a short presentation. This was an opportunity for the campers to share their stories of personal growth with one another and their families.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS
(Deleted)