

# SEE/HEAR

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

A collaborative effort of the  
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and  
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# **Uncommon Vision: Blind Student Focuses on Her Goal To Become Elementary School Teacher**

By Kay Randall, Office of Public Affairs/College of Education,  
University of Texas at Austin

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*Abstract: This article profiles Angela Wolf, a young woman who is completing her training as a teacher at the University of Texas.*

*Key Words: Family, blind, visually impaired, personal story, career development*

*Editor's Note: Angela Wolf completed her Post-Baccalaureate coursework for Elementary Education Certification at the University of Texas in May and has become a certified teacher in the state of Texas. She is currently working as the Coordinator of the Post-Secondary Program at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), a cooperative program between TSBVI and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division for Blind Services (DARS, DBS). She is putting her teaching abilities to work to help blind students, ages 18-22, gain the necessary blindness skills to succeed in achieving their educational and vocational goals.*



Alexa Cardena gets help from Angela in creating an outline for the essay she is about to write.

If you think about all of the difficult tasks that would be intimidating if you were blind, what comes to mind? Using a computer to type a paper for class or e-mail friends? Navigating around a large, unfamiliar city? Cooking a flawless five-course meal for a dinner party? Selecting a perfect outfit at your favorite funky clothing store? Teaching a highly

energetic class of 18 second graders? Chances are you would designate the first four items challenging and the last one downright impossible. Actually, it's not.

Austin's College of Education, is about to wrap up her final semester as an apprentice teacher, having spent the last three semesters teaching kindergartners and second graders. In May she will leave the university with a teacher's certificate and, she hopes, a job teaching in an elementary school classroom all her own.

A person who was blessed "with that something extra," Angela is a leader and activist in the blind community on a national level and the type of individual others allude to in conversations about inspirational behavior or the indomitableness of the human spirit.

At age 12, Angela went from sighted to blind almost overnight when her doctor administered too high a dose of Vitamin A to her, triggering a rare condition known as pseudotumor cerebri. With pseudotumor cerebri—which literally means "false brain tumor"—the body leaps to the alert and reacts as though one has a brain tumor. It produces more fluid around the brain than can be absorbed, and this excess of fluid creates a great deal of pressure. In cases such as Angela's, the pressure squeezes and destroys the optic nerves.

Although the condition normally strikes females between 20 and 50 and sometimes does not result in loss of vision—or causes loss of vision over an extended time—Angela recounts the story of her loss of sight with no sense of being misfortune's victim.

"I recall thinking almost from the beginning that regardless of my blindness, I could do whatever I wanted to do in life," says Angela. "I remember telling my parents after I first went blind that I didn't want to be different or treated like a 'weirdo.' I was very, very lucky to have grown up in Shreveport, Louisiana, which is about 60 miles away from a wonderful private training center for the blind. My parents had me in a camp there a matter of months after I lost my sight, and the learning and adaptation began.

“We started out learning Braille and how to use a cane and gradually learned more complex tasks. It’s important that people realize blindness is *not* an impairment—it’s just an inconvenience. As it turns out, I’ve had several wonderful role models who were blind and were happy, independent people, achieving incredible things and having perfectly ‘normal’ lives. I’ve never felt limited.”

To say Wolf has never been limited by her physical disability is a significant understatement. In addition to obtaining a degree in humanities from The University of Texas at Austin in 2002, she also has become an activist in the blind community and serves as president of the National Association of Blind Students. She is quoted in national newspapers on topics like better and quicker access for blind individuals to usable textbooks, directs arts programs for blind children, attends and speaks at conferences around the nation and lobbies for reasonable access for all.

“I at first did not realize what a leader Angela is in the blind community and the impressive level of respect she commands,” says Malia Henson, a teacher of second grade at St. Elmo Elementary in Austin and Wolf’s cooperating teacher this semester. “She’s extraordinary and just being around her makes you realize how much more you could do because she’s accomplishing things that people with sight won’t even try.”

Courage, optimism and an absence of self-pity have helped Angela to hold onto the childhood dream she had of being a teacher and to treat it like any other challenge that has come her way.

“Whatever I want to do, whether it’s finding my way through a building or learning to be a teacher, I just have to figure out the ‘how,’ says Angela. “I have to do things a bit differently, but, in the end, I get it done.”

Teacher preparation has presented Angela a series of problem-solving exercises that have tested her creativity but also hardened her resolve to succeed. In order to make the teaching go more smoothly, Angela's first duty on her first day with each new class has been to talk about the subject foremost on every little mind—her blindness. She has explained to the students what it means for her to be blind and stressed the permanence of it. After telling the students what her life as a blind person is like, she has opened the floor for discussion and questions.

If a student wants to know how Ms. Wolf chooses an outfit to wear in the morning, she tells them. If a student wants to know how she finds the milk and cereal in order to make breakfast, she tells them. If they want to know what she “sees” in the darkness of blindness, she tells them. If they want to know if blind people get married (Angela's husband is an accomplished musician and is blind), she tells them.

Although there are occasions when the children have tested and teased her, doing things like raising two fingers in front of her face and asking her how many fingers they were holding up, for the most part the students “get it,” Angela says.

“She's an incredibly gifted teacher,” says Mary Ellen Smith, a facilitator in the College of Education who has monitored Angela in the classroom. “And she has an uncanny directional sense and awareness of her environment. It's still been quite hard work, though, to teach a classroom full of children. It's intimidating even for someone who *isn't* blind.

“Every time a new problem arises, Angela stops and thinks, okay, so this is the situation as it stands now—what am I going to do to make it work? And she immediately begins to generate solutions. If you can even vaguely imagine what it would be like to monitor and teach a room full of young children, you get some idea of how many obstacles someone who's blind has to overcome to do this.”

Many of the changes have been a snap to implement. Horizontal stripes of masking tape were placed on the chalkboard in her class last

semester so that she could write in a straight, neat line, and she has Braille versions of the students' books. When students were not writing enough in their daily journals, Angela decided to start feeling the backs of their notebook pages—from the indentations left by the pencils, she could tell if they had filled almost an entire page or only a couple of lines.



*Above - Angela Wolf in her class of 18 second graders at St. Elmo Elementary. Right - Because Angela cannot see the students' written work, she has them read math problems, compositions and worksheets aloud to her.*



“I guess, in general, I probably encourage the children to talk more than another teacher would,” says Angela. “For example, instead of having students raise their hands to answer a question—which obviously would not work for me—I have them announce their names once. Then I call on them in the order that they announced themselves.”

To monitor writing content without being able to read what the students have written, Angela requires them to bring their papers to her and read their compositions aloud. She also uses “the Popsicle method” and draws from a cup of Popsicle sticks with the students' names on them. The student whose name is drawn has to read his or her journal entry to the rest of the class. She monitors how well they are

progressing when they're silently reading their textbooks by stopping at individual desks and having them read portions of the text to her.

"I've witnessed something really interesting as I've watched Angela over three semesters with these very young children," says Smith. "The children, after they understand what it means for Angela to be blind, assume more responsibility for their own behavior. They don't let classmates abuse the situation and they're clearly showing they realize they have a role in how well or badly each day unfolds. They have this strangely adult way of dealing with this 'difference' in Angela and begin to think about and react to the blindness in a positive way."

Asked what her dream work scenario would be, Angela describes a room of second or third graders, levels she prefers because the students still are young but have begun to work more independently and are able to engage in abstract thinking. It's a class where students have the freedom to be creative and where art, her passion, is incorporated in everything from history to math lessons. It's a sanctuary where independence and personal responsibility are encouraged and where she serves as facilitator rather than baby-sitter or drill sergeant. It's a dream Angela intends to realize.

"I know that Ms. Wolf wants to be a teacher when she grows up," says Desiree Market, an 8-year-old in Angela's class at St. Elmo, "and I think she's going to be a pretty good one. She can teach without seeing, and that's really hard to do. Especially when the kids are not always good. She's special and very smart and knows all of our voices, even from the other side of the room. I think her next class of kids is going to like her a *whole* lot."

## **Choice to Send Twins to U.S. Affirmed**

By Aman Batheja, Star-Telegram Staff Writer

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*Abstract: Twins from Taiwan graduate from high school with top honors. One of these students is blind will go on to the University of Texas to study violin with plans to become professional musician.*

*Key Words: Family, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, valedictorian, student, college*

When Helen and Judy Chang were toddlers in Taiwan, their parents had a fateful choice to make: watch their twin daughters grow up or provide them an education that would properly address the special needs of Helen, who was born blind. After exploring the limited educational opportunities available for the disabled in Taiwan, the new parents chose to send their twin daughters to live with their aunt in Texas.

Traveling from Taiwan for her daughters' graduation, Saritai Wu sat on the floor of Daniel-Meyer Coliseum. It gave her the perfect view to confirm that she made the right choice. On her right, among the sea of blue gowns, was Judy Chang, graduating fifth in the Class of 2005 at Arlington Heights High School. To her left, seated on stage, was Helen Chang, the valedictorian. It capped 13 years in Fort Worth public schools in which Helen Chang has frequently inspired those around her. She refused to be anything but an extraordinary, well-rounded student, according to teachers and school officials.

"I just admire her tremendously," said Judy Hill, Arlington Heights' academic coordinator. "When I get down, I think of Helen."

She's motivated her classmates as well. "One person said in his [college application] essay that the most inspirational person he's met in his life is Helen Chang," Hill said.

Helen's intelligence and independent spirit showed her teachers and classmates she never had to be treated like less than an average student, her uncle Joe Kemp said. In her senior year alone, she took five Advanced Placement classes.

Helen and Judy Chang will attend the University of Texas at Austin this fall. Judy plans to major in engineering, and Helen will study the violin, they said. Helen Chang said studying to be a professional musician will be more challenging than anything she attempted in high school. Because of her disability, she'll have to memorize all her pieces, she said. But she refuses to be intimidated. During her valedictorian speech, she told the crowd she was both sad and excited about ending this chapter in her life.

"This is a new beginning," she said. "We can make our futures what we want them to be."

## **Houston Youth Beep Baseball**

By Kim Joiner, Parent, Pearland, TX

*Abstract: A new youth beep baseball team is formed in Houston. Learn about this sport that was specifically designed for people with blindness. Discover resources to form a team in your area.*

*Key Words: Family, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, baseball, sports, beep baseball*

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Houston would like to announce the newly formed youth beep baseball team – THE HOUSTON MIGHTY EAGLES! Thanks to the hard work of Alice Davis, Rehabilitation Teacher for DARS-DBS and staff from that agency, children with visual impairments in the Houston area are now offered the opportunity to play on a competitive sports team.

Coach Alice Davis, Coach Angie Ortiz, Coach Ines Ortega, and Coach Ryan Harless have been practicing with the children for the past 2 months. The Mighty Eagles have soared in their ability to field the ball, hit, and run.

Dr. Ed “Doc” Bradley, President of the National Beep Baseball Association, and Ronnie Bruns, an adult beep baseball player, have been great supporters of the youth team. They have taught us the rules, donated equipment, and attended practices to teach the children drills and strategies for playing the sport. We are blessed to have adults who are willing to give back to our children!

We have also had many sponsors who have stepped forward to help with the cost of uniforms and equipment. Many thanks to: Expedited Logistic & Freight Service, LTD, Texas Creative Embroidery, Rev. Canon J. Payne, Sante Fe Trophies, Houston Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments, Bayside Little League, and Dan Sturgill.

From the beginning, I saw smiling faces anxious to learn a sport that has been designed specifically for people with blindness. Several of our players are friends and siblings with sight; however their vision does not benefit them on this team. All players must wear blindfolds in order to participate. The baseball is larger than a softball and emits a beep. There are only two bases, first and third. The bases are large, tall foam structures which also emits a different type of beep. The Beep Baseball rules have been modified for the youth league. The players bat from a tee instead of being pitched to. Once a player has batted, he/she must listen for one of the bases to begin beeping. At that time the player runs to that base. A sighted spotter is in the field and calls the name of the nearest player to go after the ball. If a fielder picks up the ball before the player gets to the base, the batter is out. If the batter reaches the base before the ball is picked up, a run is scored.

On Saturday, August 13, 2005, The Houston Mighty Eagles had their first opportunity to play in a mini “World Series”. The Little White Wings from Harlingen came to Houston to play in the series. It was a glorious sight to see such a proud and confident group of children. The Little White Wings played a fabulous game, however in the end, The Houston Mighty Eagles won. We offer many thanks to the Bayside Little League in Seabrook for hosting the World Series. At the conclusion of the game,

the children were awarded with trophies and certificates, and medals that were donated by The Bayside Little League. National and world champion power-lifter for the blind, Cody Colchado, autographed posters for all the players.

Kayla Sturgill blessed the crowd with her beautiful voice by singing “God Bless America” before the game. I can tell you that there wasn’t a dry eye in the crowd!

Most valuable players were announced for The Eagles Red and Blue teams. Congratulations to Kayleigh Joiner, MVP for the Red team, and Kayla Sturgill, MVP for the Blue team! Both children were given a beep baseball for their accomplishments.

The Eagles Red Team players are: Kayleigh Joiner, Courtney Redlinger, Brooke Valdez, Forrest Kirkpatrick, Jesse Ortiz, Raven McCoy, and Tamer Zaid.

The Eagles Blue Team players are: John Paul Garcia, David Thomas, Claire Thomas, David Harris, Kayla Sturgill, Elizabeth Ortega, and Robert Graves.

Congratulations kids – you all have once again proven to the world that “Can – Do” attitude!

Please feel free to contact Alice Davis with DARS 713-944-9924 or Kim Cunningham 281-482-8131 for information about starting a team in your area. The Youth Beep Baseball World Series will be playing in San Antonio in 2006 and we would love to have representation from across the state.

## **NAPVI Conference 2005: What an Amazing Experience**

By Linda Hulett, Parent, Houston, Texas

*Abstract: Linda Hulett, a parent of a 3 1/2-year old from Houston, describes her experience at the 2005 National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired conference in Louisville, KY.*

*Key Words: Family, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, parent, NAPVI Conference*

What an amazing experience! The world of parent conferences is all so new to me. Our son, Robert, is 10 months old. He was diagnosed with a visual impairment at 3 ½ months of age, and his current diagnosis is congenital visual impairment and infantile nystagmus.

My mother, my son, my daughter, and I went to the National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired (NAPVI) conference in Louisville, Kentucky in August. This was the first time we had attended a national conference. This national conference provides the opportunity for parents from many different areas to meet together in a warm and friendly environment to share and gain information. There were approximately 350 parents and 150 children. Free child care was provided for children with visual impairments as well as their siblings. It was wonderful to see the number of volunteers that were willing to offer their time so that we could attend the conference knowing our children were in good hands.

The conference placed a great emphasis on the difference that we, as parents, can make in the lives of our children with visual impairments. Friday night, Dr. Deborah Hatton spoke about setting high expectations, teaching children to take risks, and emphasizing how critical family support is to our children. Saturday morning, Kevin O'Connor explained how all of the services we provide for children are really about creating independence. He also addressed parents making the difference in children's lives. Sunday morning, we attended a presentation about blind athletes and the possibilities for our children. There were many sessions that were relevant to every age group of

children, and even one session focused on fathers and one on grandparents. The sessions I attended were: Getting Ready for School, Getting Ready for Life: The Importance of Including your Child in Key Activities of Daily Living; The Quest for Independence: Parent's Role in Their Child's Mobility; What Parents Need to Know about IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act); and Social Skills Development for Children and Youth with Visual Impairments. All of the sessions I attended were well presented and very informative.

One of the most amazing parts of the conference was how friendly and polite everyone was. Even though there were so many people who had never met from so many different places, it seemed as though we were friends already because of our common bond of caring for children with visual impairments. I was extremely impressed that everyone including the presenters, the professionals attending the conference, and the parents who did not know me answered my questions in detail and offered suggestions for every concern that I had regarding Robert and his development. I came home feeling like I had been rejuvenated. The ideas and suggestions were wonderful and specifically intended to help us at this point in our journey.

Oh, and I can't forget to mention that there was so much food including a chocolate fountain! You would have to see it to believe it! All at no cost to us.

Thanks to TSBVI Outreach for funding part of our trip so that we were able to be a part of this amazing event. I am so grateful that I was able to attend the conference with the help of their generosity. I am really looking forward to the NAPVI Conference in 2006!!

## **NFADB Regional Director and Texas Deafblind Family Leader**

By Yolonda Scarlett, Parent, Coppell, Texas  
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*Abstract: Meet the new National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) Region 6 Regional Director and learn more about this national organization for families focusing on issues surrounding deafblindness.*

*Key Words: Family, deafblind, National Family Association for Deaf-Blind, Region 6 NFADB*

My name is Yolonda Scarlett. I am the parent of a nine-year-old son who is deafblind with multiple disabilities and has a diagnosis of Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS). Recently, I have been appointed as the Regional Director for Region 6 with the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB). Region 6 includes the states of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and New Mexico.

NFADB is the largest national network of families focusing on issues surrounding deafblindness. NFADB supports national policies to benefit people who are deafblind and works with national projects such as DB-LINK, the National Technical Assistance Consortium (NTAC), the National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness and the American Association of Deaf-Blind (AADB). NFADB supports families by sharing information related to deafblindness, provides resources and referrals and publishes a tri-annual newsletter that addresses topics and activities of interest to parents and family members. Also, NFADB collaborates with professionals to strengthen consumer and family representation.

NFADB has divided the nation into ten regions. Each region is represented by a Regional Director. Regional Directors serve as resources to families and professionals in their region. The Regional Director also represents their region on the NFADB Board while representing NFADB in their region. The Regional Director is a liaison position connecting the NFADB to coordinators, directors and others in leadership positions within their region to seek and share information relating to deafblindness.

As families, we are each other's greatest resource! By working together, we can help to improve the quality of life for families and people who are deafblind all over the country. I am looking forward to the opportunity to get to know other families on the state and national levels. For additional information on NFADB or if you would like to become a member of NFADB, please contact me at <yoscarlett@hotmail.com>.

### **Tyler Student Chosen for Braille Challenge**

By Betty Waters, Staff Writer, Tyler Morning Telegraph  
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*Abstract: Profile of Kassandra Cardenas, a blind elementary school student who represented Texas in the finals of the National Braille Challenge.*

*Key Words: Family, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, Braille, National Braille Challenge*

A blind Tyler Independent School District second-grader left town Thursday to represent Texas in the finals of the only national academic competition for school-age Braille readers from the U.S. and Canada on Saturday in Los Angeles.

Woods Elementary pupil Kassandra Cardenas is one of 60 contestants, ages 6-19, invited to the 2005 National Braille Challenge Invitational, sponsored by the Braille Institute of America. "Kassie," as she is called, was picked out of more than 300 blind and visually impaired students from across the country in grades 1-12 who competed in the preliminary round of the fifth annual Braille Challenge to win a spot in the finals in California.

Blind since birth, "Kassie," 8, takes her disability in stride, confidently walking the hallways when school is in session and acting in class like any other student, except for using a cane, Braille textbooks and specialized equipment, such as a Braille notetaker and Braille printer.

She is already very goal-oriented despite her young age. Kassie wants to win in the apprentice category open to first- and second-graders of the two-stage Braille Challenge. Another goal, she says, is to increase her Braille reading skills to 100 words per minute and ultimately she hopes to become a lawyer when she grows up.

Top prizes for first place in the apprentice category of the Braille Challenge are a \$1,000 savings bond and a PAC Mate portable personal pocket computer device adapted with a Braille display for the visually impaired. It is valued at more than \$4,000. The second-place winner will receive a \$750 savings bond and the third-place winner will receive a \$500 savings bond.

Contestants in the apprentice category will be tested in Braille reading comprehension, Braille spelling and proofreading. If Kassie wins, the child said she would put the money “in the bank I guess and save it maybe for my college.”

To reach the final round of competition, she practiced her Braille skills over and over, then took a preliminary National Braille Challenge test at school administered by her teacher under strict guidelines last March.

“I had 25 minutes to complete the reading comprehension test. What I had to do was read three stories and answer questions, then if I had time I could proofread. I had time,” Kassie said. “Then I took the spelling test. I had 25 minutes, 50 words and I did that on time. And then I took the proofreading test. I had 20 sentences and 25 minutes to correct the sentences.”

She waited and waited and waited to hear how she did. Finally in early May a letter arrived, written in both Braille and regular print. Upon reading the letter, Kassie did not speak at first, then excitedly told her mother, Anabell Cardenas, “Moma, look in the mail.” The letter invited the girl to the national competition.

Ms. Cardenas said, “I was real excited. I was real happy because I knew she waited for this.”

Kassie next made a somber phone call telling one of her teachers, Elsie Rao, "I didn't pass." A moment later she confessed, "I'm kidding." The youngster and teacher of the visually impaired who has had Kassie under her wing for four years laughed and ecstatically burst into celebration.

Kassie received pats on the back, cheers and congratulations from other students when a school-wide announcement was made that she had made the finals.

In the following days Kassie very quickly settled back into Braille practice, this time for the finals with coaching from her teacher. She drilled on Braille skills two afternoons weekly after school during May and continued practicing after school dismissed for the summer. In the meantime, an anonymous donor in the community contributed funds for the trip to Los Angeles for Kassie, her mother, big sister and teacher for three days for the Braille Challenge and some sight-seeing.

The National Braille Challenge Invitational began in 2000 as a regional competition to promote Braille literacy among blind and visually impaired students in Southern California, then evolved into a national competition that also attracts contestants from Canada.

Kassie is the first Tyler ISD student to compete in the Braille finals. "She is the first student I've had who seriously concentrated on improving her Braille skills specifically for this contest," Ms. Rao said. "She is extremely bright, quite intelligent. I knew this when she was little bitsy. Early on, we (educators) began to see that she has a wonderful memory, good language skills and was able to figure out complex answers. She is an excellent reader and a good speaker."

Upon seeing those qualities in Kassie, educators at Woods Elementary wanted to challenge the girl, Ms. Rao said. She was placed in the gifted program and is able to compete with her sighted peers on an even basis.

"Never in my teaching career have I ever had one (pupil) that was this smart and learned this quickly," Ms. Rao said.

Kassie read on a second-grade level when school started last fall, but as the year progressed, she raised her reading skills to a sixth-grade level by the time school dismissed for the summer. Her favorite recreational reading is “Harry Potter” books in Braille. Kassie not only participates in regular classes to learn the same academics other children learn, but also takes part in special sessions for the blind and visually impaired. She learns Braille, how to use special equipment for the blind, social skills and assistance with orientation and mobility to teach her to function in a regular environment. She interacts with classmates, goes to parties, sang a solo at First Baptist Church’s south campus recently and plans to start back to gymnastics.

Although visually impaired children usually don’t have good motor skills, Kassie enjoys the challenge of tumbling, thinks the balance beam is fun and likes to do back-bends even though it is difficult for most visually impaired children to figure out where they are in time and space. Kassie is also bilingual. Although born in Tyler, she is fluent in Spanish and English since her mother is from El Salvador and her father from Mexico.

Doctors anticipated a difficult birth and advised Ms. Cardenas to have an abortion, but she says she felt in her heart it was not the right thing to do and decided she would have the baby. Kassie was born blind, except for slight light perception. Surgery in an attempt to carry out a cornea transplant to enable her to see was unsuccessful.

A year or two ago Kassie, who wears eye prosthesis, went home after attending a production of a play in which Helen Keller’s mother cried upon learning her baby girl was blind and deaf.

Kassie wanted to know if her mother was sad when she was born. “I told her when you were born, you were so pretty, so beautiful, I loved you very much, but I was sad because you are blind,” Ms. Cardenas told her daughter. Kassie assured her mother, “It’s okay; it’s okay.”



**NATIONAL CONTESTANT:** Cassandra Cardenas, blind since birth, is shown during a practice session using specialized equipment of a Braille notetaker and Braille writer for the National Braille Challenge Invitational. (Staff Photo by D.J.Peters)

Kassie has grown into a youngster so independent and normal that her mother sometimes forgets she is blind. Ms. Cardenas is a wonderful mother because she encourages Kassie to be independent despite a natural tendency of parents to want to protect a blind child all the time, Ms. Rao said. “When that happens, (a blind child) doesn’t learn to be independent,” she said.

When Kassie says she can’t do something because she is blind, her mother tells her to try. “I think Cassandra in the future will be an awesome person because she is very smart and she is going to get to be somebody. I tell her you can do it,” Ms. Cardenas said.

Betty Waters covers Tyler public schools. She can be reached at 903-596-6286 or e-mailed at <news@tylerpaper.com>.

## **The National Agenda: What’s New**

By Cyral Miller, Outreach Director, TSBVI  
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*Abstract: This article provides an update on the National Agenda.*

*Key Words: Programming, visual impaired, blind, deafblind, National Agenda, parents.*

Eleven years ago, a **National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, including those with Multiple Disabilities** set out a new vision for this field. This initiative was endorsed by the US Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and embraced by organizations and agencies across the country. The movement came about by imagining what our world would look like if *ideal* services were in place. Goals in ten areas have now been established which, if achieved, would guarantee that students with visual impairments were quickly identified, appropriately assessed, and properly educated with quality services addressing unique needs for themselves and their families. These are the goals:

1. Students and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Appropriate quality services will be provided by teachers of the visually impaired.
2. Policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure the right of all parents to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.
3. Universities with a minimum of one full-time faculty member in the area visual impairment will prepare a sufficient number of teachers and O&M specialists for students with visual impairments to meet personnel needs throughout the country.
4. Caseloads will be determined based on the assessed needs of students.
5. Local education programs will ensure that all students have access to a full array of service delivery options.
6. All assessments and evaluations of students will be conducted by and /or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments and their parents.
7. Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.

8. All educational goals and instruction will address the academic and expanded core curricula based on the assessed needs of each student with visual impairments.
9. Transition services will address developmental and educational needs (birth through high school) to assist students and their families, in setting goals and implementing strategies through the life continuum commensurate with the student's aptitudes, interests, and abilities.
10. To improve student learning, service providers will engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development.

Although these ideals were not realized by the year 2000, as originally proposed, a process was established that has enabled states and organizations to continue to actively pursue these goals on an ongoing basis. Here are some outstanding accomplishments, spurred on by hopes of achieving all ten National Agenda goals:

- The National Association of State Directors of Special Education collaborated with the Hilton/Perkins Program to develop and provide national training on a publication that outlines best practice in educational services. *Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Educational Service Guidelines* is available from Perkins School for the Blind.
- The National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired (NAPVI) has been offering training on IDEA across the nation in partnership with the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights (PACER). Joint efforts with American Printing House for the Blind and Hadley School for the Blind led to a well-attended National Family Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.
- A new Federal grant supports students in doctorate level programs to ensure that certification programs will have qualified staff available in the future. There are still openings – contact <<http://www.pco.edu/nclvi.htm>> immediately to enroll.
- The Itinerant Personnel Division in AERBVI produced a position paper on caseload analysis, which can help practitioners

advocate for appropriate caseloads. This is available at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/caseload-position-paper.htm>.

- The Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute (JLTLI) in 2004 led to the development of three position papers with information to assist parents, administrators and test publishers developing standardized assessments. Go to <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=58&TopicID=264>.
- The American Printing House for the Blind Accessible Tests Department has created new guidelines useful for development of assessment tools. Find them at <http://www.aph.org/tests/index.html>.
- A collaborative Solutions Forum project succeeded in inserting language into the new Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act establishing a National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) to help ensure timely delivery of accessible instructional media. Regulations are now being drafted to refine the legislative mandates. Information is posted at <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=58&TopicID=255>.
- To help teachers and families learn more about the unique needs of students with visual impairments, a unique web-based Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum (RECC) has been established on the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/recc/index.htm>.
- A community college certification course in braille transcribing has been piloted at Northwest Vista Community College in San Antonio, Texas and is now being developed for online access. AFB and the Texas Education Agency got this project underway. Verizon Communications is helping create the online coursework to make this training available more widely. See the press release at <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=&DocumentID=2798>.

These kinds of achievements demonstrate that the National Agenda has become an important catalyst for moving the field of visual impairment forward. Much remains to be done. You can get involved, too. Listings of the goals and goal leaders, state coordinators, National

Agenda PowerPoint presentations, state reports and plans and more is available at <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/index.htm>>. Contact your state coordinator and see how you can help guarantee that students with visual impairments are quickly identified, appropriately assessed, and properly educated with quality services addressing their unique needs for themselves and their families.

## **Essential Literacy Experiences for Visually Impaired Children**

By Eva Lavigne, Education Specialist,  
TSBVI Visually Impaired Outreach

*Abstract: This article suggests a way to individualize literacy experiences for visually impaired students in order to promote meaningful reading and writing.*

*Key Words: Programming, blind, visual impaired, deafblind, literacy, reading, Braille, essential experiences, concepts, collaboration.*

All children require early experiences to provide a foundation for understanding what they read. “For reading to be meaningful, the child must be able to relate what he or she read to previous experiences.” (Hall and Rodabaugh, 1979). “Without direct experiences, the child may read and write words correctly, but not truly understand what they are reading and writing about.” (Koenig and Farrenkopf, 1997). Fully sighted children have access to visual media, visual materials such as print and pictures within in their environment, and they incidentally observe the common activities of life. Students with visual impairments often times are limited in the ability to gain access to these essential experiences. The visual impairment may impede incidental learning and opportunities to gain access to naturally occurring experiences in the environment. Visually impaired students need direct, hands on practice with basic concepts (such as size, shape, position, time, classification), as well as, direct exposure to common everyday life activities so that they form a foundation of essential experiences that provide meaning to reading and writing.

Research indicates the importance of a rich base of concrete experiences as an essential foundation for the development of literacy for students with visual impairments. Alan Koenig and Carol Farrenkopf (1997) analyzed 254 stories from basal literacy series grades one through three to identify experiences necessary to bring meaning to each story. They identified 22 global areas of experience as essential, listed below. For a complete listing by grade level and number of stories containing the experiences, please refer to the article, "Essential experiences to undergrid the early development of literacy," Koenig, A.J., & Farrenkopf, C. (1997). *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 91, 14-24.

## **GLOBAL EXPERIENCES (KOENIG & FARRENKOPF, 1997)**

### **1. Experiences typically gained through daily activities:**

- Doing or making things (crafts, physical activity, cleaning up)
- Experiences with friends --- pretending (friends, games, competition, playing, party)
- Working together, sharing, helping (helping, teams, sharing)
- Looking for or finding something (mystery, treasure, finding something or someone)
- Experiences in the community (community, cities, occupations, places in the community, parade, circus)
- Experiences at home (parts of and things in houses, clothes, cleaning up, sleeping)
- Experiences with living creatures (animals, pets, birds, frogs, penguins, bears, buffalo, whales)
- Experiencing emotions and a sense of well being (feelings, sick, growing, freedom, imagination, jealous)
- Exploring nature, plants, insects (things in the sky, outdoors, insects, water bodies, flowers, plants, forest)
- Traveling or visiting others (traveling to visit relatives, friends, or places)

- Experiences with books (fairy tales, legends, reading, writing, books)
- Getting into trouble (breaking things, fighting, teasing, tricks)
- Experiences with family and family traditions (family members, birthday, presents, special days)
- Experiences with weather (weather, flooding, climate, storms)
- Experiences with eating (food, meals, cooking, eating, fruit and vegetables)
- Going to a farm (farm, fishing, hunting)
- Learning about people who are different (blindness, Braille, deaf, disability)
- Exploring the arts (dancing, singing, instruments, music)
- School experiences (school, rules practicing, alphabet, classroom, drawing)
- Using different forms of transportation (transportation, flying, train, ships)

## **2. Experiences typically gained through instruction:**

- Learning and content areas (countries, common and uncommon objects, royalty, cities, Native Americans)
- Understanding specific concepts (time concepts, sensations, colors, position, size, body parts, actions, counting, measurement)

These global example experiences give a wonderful set of reoccurring types of experiences that are contained within typical first, second, and third grade reading passages. However, in order to meet the individual visually impaired student's literacy experience needs, a more individualized approach is required.

Individualizing literacy experiences for a visually impaired student would help ensure that the student is provided these experiences prior

**PROGRAMMING**

to and during the time that they read stories containing the related theme and concepts.

Who will be responsible for providing these essential experiences? It would make sense for this to be a shared responsibility. Many of these types of experiences lend themselves to being done at home with family. The TVI (teacher of the visually impaired) could provide some of these experiences during direct instructional time with the student. The reading teacher may find that a particular experience would be beneficial for the entire class or a small group of students. A COMS (certified orientation and mobility specialist) might provide an experience during an orientation and mobility lesson. The key to successfully providing these experiences is to have good communication between all team members, and a way to document the experiences needed, the experiences provided, and a way to decide who will provide the experience. Although this is a team and collaborative approach, it will be necessary for one of the team members to take the lead in making sure the experiences are identified and carried out. The team can negotiate who will take the lead and who will provide the experience. The parent should be an integral part of the team and may help provide many of the experiences. Each situation is unique and therefore the lead person may be different from one visually impaired student to another.

In an attempt to provide a structure for collaboration and a way to document essential experiences for an individual visually impaired student, I have developed a one-page form entitled: Essential Literacy Experiences for the Visually Impaired Student. An example of this form is show below:

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## Essential Literacy Experiences for Visually Impaired Students

Student: Jim Bob Square Pants		Date of Preview: 9-26-05 (TVI)	
Story Title: Little Bear Birthday Soup		Date Read in Class: 10-3-05 thru 10-7-05	
Vocabulary / Concepts	Bear, cake, soup, cook, smell, eat Highfrequency words: says, something Concepts: surprise birthday party, making soup, birthday cake, inviting friends over.	Evaluation/Comments	
Skills TEKS/IEP	r-controlled vowels: ur, ir, or building fluency Focus on high frequency words: says, something	Evaluation/Comments	
Essential Experiences  (Concrete experiences selected from the story that provide meaning for the visually impaired student)	Concept "making soup" What goes into making soup? carrots, peas, potatoes, tomatoes, etc. Explore a variety of veggies (whole and cut up). What happens to veggies when cooked? Who: Mom When: Weekend (10-1-05) Where: Trip to grocery store and home kitchen	Concept "surprise party" & "birthday cake" "What is a surprise party?" Discussion "Birthday cake" comes in different sizes and shapes (round, square, rectangular). Shape of cake depends on the shape of the pans. How many candles on the cake? Who: TVI When: Direct VI time Where: VI Space	Concept: friends and inviting friends to something Who are your friends? Plan a surprise party for your teacher and invite friends to a lunch surprise party. (TVI) Make invitations for friends and one for the teacher. (TVI) Decorate cupcakes for the lunch party. (Mom at home the night before.) Have surprise lunch in classroom with invited friends and teacher. (Teacher in classroom.) Who: shared (see above) Where: shared When: shared
Evaluation/ Comments			

**Sample Essential Literacy Experiences for the Visually Impaired Student Form** Additional blank forms are provided on the TSBVI website at <[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)>. Type in “Essential Literacy Experiences form” in the SEARCH field.

## **HOW TO USE THE ESSENTIAL LITERACY EXPERIENCES FOR VI STUDENTS:**

The form was developed for use with visually impaired students who are receiving their primary reading instruction in the classroom or in a resource classroom, and are receiving direct instruction in compensatory skills from their TVI. This tool can be used by the TVI (teacher of the visually impaired) to gather critical information about reading passages that the student will be reading in the classroom or resource classroom. It was designed to be a collaborative tool, one which the TVI and classroom (reading teacher) would discuss and fill out together. The ideal situation would be for the TVI and classroom reading teacher to meet regularly and on an on-going basis to discuss the story elements such as vocabulary, concepts, TEKS and skills for the reading lessons, and to make a list of any essential experiences that the student would need in order to have a meaningful understanding of the concepts within the story. In this collaborative model, the TVI and reading teacher can make some decisions about how the visually impaired student’s instruction will take place. The form lists vocabulary and concepts from the story, skills, TEKS/IEP objectives worked on related to the story, and essential experiences the visually impaired student will need in order to gain meaning from the story.

The form also has a place to indicate the date that the story was previewed. The preview technique is critical for identifying essential experiences the visually impaired student will need for a particular story. The preview involves someone (parent, TVI, reading teacher, etc.) sitting with the visually impaired student and asking questions related to the concepts and experiences found in the story. For example, if the story is about going to the beach and making a sand castle, the preview might involve questions such as:

- Tell me what you know about a beach. What would you find at the beach?
- Have you ever been to a beach?
- If so, where was the beach and what did you do there?
- Do you know what a sand castle is? Have you ever made one?

Drawing from these questions, the previewer can use the Essential Experiences for Visually Impaired Students form to jot down the experiences that appear to need additional real experiences in order for some reading concepts to make more sense. It may be that the student in the above example has had experiences playing in sand, but has never been to the beach and has never built a sand castle. Building upon the experience of playing in sand by providing an experience of building a sand castle could help the visually impaired student have a better understanding of the concept of sand castle as it relates to the story. Additional experiences such as bringing in shells, sand pails, shovels, swimming gear, etc. might also add to the experiences that would bring meaning to the story. A family trip to the beach sometime in the future might be planned.

Research and best practice in educating students with visual impairments supports the importance of learning through experience. These concrete essential experiences are critical in the development of meaningful literacy skills.

## **REFERENCES:**

Hall, A. & Rodabaugh, B. (1979). Development of a pre-reading concept program for visually handicapped children. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 73, 257-263,

Koenig, A.J., & Farrenkopf, C. (1997). Essential experiences to undergrid the early development of literacy. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 91, 14-24.

## Taking a Look at the

### ***FIELA Curriculum: 730 Learning Environments* by Dr. Lilli Nielsen**

By Kate Moss, Deafblind Specialist, Texas Deafblind Outreach

*Abstract: This article is based on a book by Dr. Lilli Nielsen titled The FIELA Curriculum: 730 Learning Environments and lists the developmental behaviors in three-month increments as described in this book.*

*Key Words: Programming, visually impaired, blind, deafblind, Dr. Lilli Nielsen, Active Learning, developmental behaviors.*

Many of the children who are congenitally blind with additional disabilities or deafblind have a great deal of difficulty learning because of their inability to access information in the environment the way a typically developing child does. Though they learn in similar ways, the learning process a typically developing child uses before the age of three may not be naturally accessible to the child with vision and hearing loss or motor impairments.

If you watch children under the age of three you see they are constantly moving in and through their environment, interacting with objects. They examine them by tasting, smelling, touching, listening and looking. Through this interaction they use muscles and develop coordination to sing, talk, eat, reach, grasp, lift, bang, shake, and throw. They learn about properties and concepts such as weight, temperature, textures, size, color, shape, and smell by comparing and contrasting the things they contact. Children at this age literally form the neural pathways that help them to see similarities and differences in objects, people, and experiences. This type of learning is the critical foundation of all future learning. Babies and toddlers are also developing emotionally at this age. Beginning with critical bonding to mom and dad, the baby quite naturally learns to accept and interact with an ever-expanding circle of people.

Many congenitally blind and deafblind children fail to develop these foundational concepts in the same way as a typical child because they cannot interact independently with their environments --- their world

may only extend only as far as their hands or feet or mouth can touch. Early bonding may be jeopardized by hospitalization and medical treatments. Getting to people or even knowing that there are others around may not be easy. Many of these children continue to function at a very early stage of cognitive and emotional development even after their bodies have grown and they have become much older.

Dr. Lilli Nielsen talks about the importance of addressing the child's development in cognitive, physical and emotional areas. She offers strategies that work to advance the child's learning. I recently reread her book, *The FIELA Curriculum: 730 Learning Environments*. In this book Dr. Nielsen describes behaviors for developmental levels from birth to 48 months (4 years) in three-month increments. When we are using an Active Learning approach to instruction, it is important to have a clear picture of each stage of development especially with children who are older than 4 chronologically but developmentally below the age of 4. Becoming a better observer of the child's behaviors helps guide material design, learning environments, and interaction strategies when utilizing Active Learning. Below is a list of various behaviors discussed in Dr. Nielsen's book. I would encourage parents and professionals to get a copy of this book for a more in-depth discussion of these behaviors and the adult's role in facilitating development of skills. Being familiar with these developmental behaviors is invaluable in utilizing an Active Learning approach.

### **BEHAVIORS 0-3 MONTHS**

- Movements become more and more intentional.
- Greater awareness of tactile, visual auditory, gustatory and olfactory experiences reinforced by repetition
- It s the activities of the child's own body and with objects in his surroundings that form the basis for perception — needs rich environment that provides feedback

### **BEHAVIORS 3-6 MONTHS**

- Developing finger strength and dexterity through scratching

- Plays with his/her own fingers, interlacing and fiddling at midline
- Wrist rotation also comes from playing with hands
- Pushing objects to discover perceptual effects of auditory, tactile or visual nature.
- Grasping and letting go of objects and experimenting with various ways to grasp, and becoming able to choose the way that works best for a specific purpose.
- Grasping and keeping – combines ability to grasp with muscle strength to hold.
- Banging with clenched fists on surfaces and own head
- Visually following objects swinging to and fro within reach
- Acquiring control of head movements by lifting head and turning while in prone
- Bracing feet against everything within reach of feet – builds muscle strength and haptic-perceptual skills to enable the child to bear the weight of his own body
- Mouthing fingers and objects – helps to develop skills for eating, speech
- Developing varied ways to signal people in his/her surroundings to express wants, needs, well-being, disappointment, pain
- To be active in a prone position in preparation of learning to sit unsupported (support bench work typically)

### **BEHAVIORS 6-9 MONTHS**

- Rolling on the floor, struggling to stand on hands and knees, sitting and lying repeatedly in preparation to stand and balance
- Moving an object from hand to hand
- Banging with one hand on the object held in the other hand
- Reaching for and letting go of objects
- Picking objects up and repeating a series of actions

- Using tongue, lips, and gums for exploring objects that continue to develop mouth motor skills – a prerequisite for putting food into the mouth
- Banging on objects and surfaces with open hand – child's awareness of the effect he has enhances cognitive development
- Using banging activity with an open or clenched hand to contact the person who is carrying him
- Reaching towards another person or in other ways signaling that he wants to be held
- Experimenting with using his voice in different ways and wanting to present the acquired skill to an adult without actually wanting to communicate
- Achieving spatial relations, first within reach in lying or sitting, later by crawling or shuffling around the surroundings
- Crawling after the objects he has thrown out

### **BEHAVIORS 9-12 MONTHS**

- Crawling around on the floor, pulling himself to standing and practicing balance
- Walking sideways while holding on to sofa or table
- Putting an index finger into all available holes and picking up crumbs – develops pincer grasp
- Manipulating objects and sucking or biting everything he gets in his hand
- Further development of wrist rotation through manipulating objects
- Further development of mouth motor skills through sucking and biting objects
- Expanding experiential base through expanded manipulation of objects

- Banging on everything with some object in his/her hand (tool usage)
- Separating toys, pouring from containers, placing objects on specific spots (beginnings of constructive play)
- Experimenting with vocalization without actually wanting to communicate
- Using newly acquired skill of babbling for communication
- Achieving further understanding of spatial relations — first with objects in relationship to his body, and later by placing objects on certain spots within reach.
- Achieving further understanding of spatial relations as he develops the ability and desire to explore larger environments
- Starting to play hiding games with objects — developing object permanence
- Performing simple functions of daily living (taking off hat, putting food in mouth, etc.) — the child needs to have opportunities to use skills learned in games in daily living activities
- Begins to respond to emotional attention and develops strong attachments to a few people from people he sees as meeting his needs
- May begin to imitate adults with whom there is a strong emotional attachment and to play in an experimental way so he achieves object concept and commences to develop self-identification
- May begin to show separation anxiety (rehearsing affective bonding) when not with a trusted adult

## **BEHAVIORS 12-15 MONTHS**

- Crawling up onto sofas or big soft chairs
- Walking
- Eating using his/her fingers and a spoon alternatively

- Drinking from a cup
- Playing banging games with objects (banging on a variety of objects to compare with hands or an object)
- Banging with travel cane (allow some experimentation so the child learns what works best)
- Playing with big objects while sitting on the floor — this improves muscle strength, coordination of arm movements, enhances balance, improves concepts of size and weight
- Building simple dens — he may build the den and immediately knock it down — develops important spatial relations and constructive play
- Playing with quantities — rhythmic kicking, clapping, banging and vocalization patterns, putting multiple objects in one hand for banging games
- Putting in and pouring from containers and placing objects next to and in front of oneself — builds understanding of quantities and relations between objects, concepts such as full, empty, too much, etc.
- Placing objects on top of each other — may start to try to stack, may place small object under larger one and immediately remove --- object permanence (*Blind children seem to learn object permanence by placing object in a specific place, doing something else and finding it again.*)
- Exploring, examining, comparing and discovering new ways to do familiar activities
- Using one-word sentences for expressing wants and needs as well as achieving the concept of relationship between words and actions
- Inviting the adult to play rough and tumble games
- Drawing at the level of scribbling a few lines on each piece of paper — preliminary to learning to write and to illustrate the surroundings in two dimensions

- Improving eye-hand coordination to fixate on activity child is performing — looking at what he is doing
- Child has established attachment to parents and key caregivers so he is not as anxious around strangers — he begins to show interest in other children but without making physical contact

### **BEHAVIORS 15-18 MONTHS**

- Climbing up and down on sofas, climbing over obstacles and underneath furniture, and going up and down a few steps — achieving increasing gross motor control
- Separating objects
- Imitating adult's activities
- Attempting to perform “putting together” activities using objects that do not require much accuracy (e.g., magnets on board)
- Using skills learned at earlier developmental levels in new ways — related to problem-solving and planning another activity
- Listening intently to other children's crying or babbling, and maybe imitating sound, but not for the purpose of initiating play
- Inviting parents or trusted caregivers and selectively inviting a stranger to participate in give-and-take games

### **BEHAVIORS 16-24 MONTHS**

- Jumping on both sofa and hard materials, as well as walking up and down stairs
- Pushing furniture and big boxes, pulling a cart or garden hose, lifting heavy objects
- Moving objects around in the room or from one room to another
- Placing objects behind cushions or open doors or big soft chairs
- Building simple dens with chairs, rugs, sheets
- Participating in domestic work

- Planning the next activity by placing objects in different spots around the room — purposefully and determinedly moving from place to place
- Undressing
- Basic role-playing (feeding/drinking with doll, cooking, etc.) May perform movements that belong to a game
- Exploring and experimenting — related to problem-solving
- Sharing an experience with other people, as well as protesting about untimely interference or interruption of his/her activity
- Moving towards another child — to watch, listen, touch, pull hair, hit, and poke

### **BEHAVIORS 24-30 MONTHS**

- Running, jumping, walking, experimenting with balancing on one leg, walking on curbs, dancing with an adult --- may be surprised and afraid if he falls even though he is not necessarily hurt
- Experimenting with numbers of items and with concepts such as full, empty, big, heavy, and color
- Experimenting with scissors and crayons
- Enjoying making himself dirty in a puddle or by using food or paint
- Experimenting using a knife for cutting and spreading
- Transferring to various daily living functions the skills achieved while playing such as pouring, washing dishes, dressing, etc.
- Very inquisitive — will leave an activity to find out what made a sound or what someone else is doing
- Playing with words, using short sentences while talking to self and others
- Still shy with some strangers, but expands circle to include more familiar people

- Sits and plays next to another child, occasionally imitating, but still very engrossed in own objects and activities
- Becomes shy away from familiar surroundings or people. Has difficulty separating from parents or caregivers

## **BEHAVIORS 30-36 MONTHS**

- Understands 50-70% of what he is told
- Improving language by using an increasing number of words — knows he can make his/herself understood and will become frustrated if you do not understand
- Improving gross motor skills by crawling up slopes, gym equipment, playground equipment, riding tricycles, swinging, jumping, dancing, etc.
- Improving fine motor skills by putting small objects in small holes, model cars in model garage, making representational drawings (mom, dog, etc.)
- Can share available toys to some degree
- More and more independent in daily living skills activities
- Will become very angry with parents or caregivers if they try to help him do things he wants to do own his/her own
- Has a need to share his/her experiences with an adult — the child must initiate the sharing
- Behaviors 36-42 Months
- Experimenting with high speed while bicycling, swinging, running, kicking
- Jumping on one foot
- Experimenting with any tool he gets hold of such as hammer, saw, beater, scissors, tube of toothpaste, saltshaker, etc.
- Role-play using miniature cars, houses, people, animals

- Building a new den every day, sometimes rebuilding it many times each day --- bringing toys and other belongings to the den
- Still improving ability to talk — asks for names of things
- Begins to understand instruction at three years of developmental age
- Trusts most people — may follow or walk away with strangers who are nice to him

### **BEHAVIORS 42-48 MONTHS**

- Using all skills learned previously while playing alone or with others
- Beginning to understand there is a future — may not want to take down den but rather save it for tomorrow's activity
- May furnish den more like his/her home
- Plays with dolls, miniatures, cars, animals, etc. – often in a dramatic manner
- Participates in group activities and playing with other children or adults
- Busy throughout the day
- Willing to follow simple instructions to complete task if not too long

### **REFERENCE:**

- Nielsen, Lilli, 1998. *The FIELA Curriculum: 730 Learning Environments*. SIKON, Copenhagen, Denmark.

## Tips for Developing “Good” Communication

Excerpt from “Early Interactions With Children Who Are Deaf-Blind,”

By Deborah Gleason

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The National Clearinghouse on Children Who Are Deaf-Blind

<<http://www.tr.wou.edu/dblink>>

*Abstract: The following tips are from the DB-LINK fact sheet “Early Interactions With Children Who Are Deaf-Blind” available in its entirety in both English and Spanish at <http://www.tr.wou.edu/dblink/early.htm>. This fact sheet presents numerous ways to interact with the young deafblind child and offers suggestions for giving consistent sensory cues. Caregivers are provided suggestions for recognizing and responding to the deafblind child’s signals. Techniques for encouraging exploration of the environment are shared.*

*Key Words: Programming, deafblind, early interactions, communication , sensory cues.*

Early communication development is based on four ideas:

- Developing a close and trusting relationship with your child
- Using consistent daily routines in which your child is fully involved
- Providing your child with cues so he or she can learn to anticipate what is going to happen
- Giving your child opportunities to have some control over his or her environment

You, as the parent, take the all-important beginning steps by developing a close and trusting relationship with your child. One of the most important things you can do to develop a sense of bonding and security is to hold your baby in your arms. Your baby will learn how you move and will feel safe and secure as he encounters events of the day with you. Rather than feeling alone and isolated in his own world, he will begin to learn about a larger world that includes caring people and a

variety of interesting movements, things to touch, textures, smells, and perhaps some sounds and sights.

As you join your child in play, you demonstrate that you share your child's interests. You play simple turn-taking games together, which, through daily repetition, a child may learn to recognize. You interact in ways that encourage your child to tolerate touch and handling, and in which he or she can begin to demonstrate enjoyment during interactions. The following suggestions may be helpful as you and your child learn to communicate together:

**“Hello. It’s me. Let’s play.”** Always greet your child with a special “hello” (touching her chest or shoulder, for example) to let her know someone is there. Then let her know who it is with your own special “name sign” (by helping her feel Dad’s scratchy chin or beard, or Mom’s hair, or a watch or ring you always wear). Tell her what you will do together (touch her diaper to indicate diaper changing, for example, or introduce a favorite toy or movement game). Remember to say “good-bye” before you leave, perhaps by waving “bye” with your hand under her hand.

**Establish predictable routines with clear beginnings and ends.** What routine activities happen during the day for you and your child? Consider activities such as eating, dressing, bathing, and playing and think about how you can let your child know what will happen, when it will start, and when it will end. Perhaps you have a special blanket on which you play on the floor together. Getting this out together and sitting down on it will signal the beginning of play. Putting it away together signals the end.

**Involve your child in the whole activity.** Your child will learn the sequence of the activity and develop many concepts through his active participation in the whole activity. Remember that a young child who is deafblind must physically participate in the entire sequence of an activity in order to gather the same information that another child gathers just by watching. For example, at mealtime, you and your child go to the kitchen together, open the cabinet, take out a bowl, take out the jar of

food, open the drawer to get a spoon and put the food into the bowl. Perhaps you heat it up in a microwave oven and when the bell rings, you both bring the warm food to the table. At the beginning of a meal, your child may touch his bib before you help him put it on, and when he is finished eating he can help take off his bib. You bring the dirty dishes to the sink together and turn on the warm water to rinse them. Throughout the activity, you offer your child simple signs (hungry, eat, drink, all done, wash).

**Provide opportunities to make choices.** Throughout the day, give your child choices: bounce or rock? cracker or juice? bells or slinky? pat your hands or kick your feet? You could show her two toys (perhaps the giggle ball and a mylar balloon) from which to choose. If she has some vision, you may hold the toys where she is best able to see them, alternately moving each one to help get her visual attention and watching to see which one she looks at longer or reaches toward. If she is not able to see the toys, you can help her touch each toy by gently bringing the toys to her hands (rather than taking her hands and putting them on the toys) and watching to see which one she touches longer, keeps her hand on, or tries to grasp. (Sometimes you may have to guess her choice.)

**Remember to offer pauses.** Some children take a little longer to process the information that they are receiving. It is important that they are given enough time to respond. If we don't allow the child this time, she may give up trying. Respect your child's pace and follow his or her lead. If she has chosen the giggle ball, you turn it on for her, then after a brief play time, turn it off and pause, waiting expectantly, leaving both your hand and the giggle ball very close to her hand. She can have some control over the game by telling you she wants "more." When you slow down and offer plenty of pauses, you allow your child time to anticipate and respond. You also give yourself time to recognize your child's responses.

Perhaps your son has a music box with illuminated moving pictures that he enjoys, but he doesn't have the motor ability to turn the knob to activate the music and light box himself. You and your child touch the

music box together, pause, and then you turn the music box on for your child. When the music and moving lights stop, however, you don't immediately turn it back on. Instead, you wait with both your hand and the toy near your son's hands for him to give a signal, such as touching the toy or your hand, or waving his arms or vocalizing that he wants more. You then immediately respond to his request by turning on the toy for him.

**Watch for cues.** Stay alert for signals your child may give you that he or she is "ready" to communicate and participate in turn-taking games. Your child may signal that she wants to continue the game or, perhaps, she is "all done" or needs a break from the communication/interaction. She may kick her feet, wave her arms, make sounds, reach to touch your hand or the giggle ball, or use another signal. When she no longer indicates she wants "more," you may offer her another choice of play activities. Look for the following: quiet alertness, orienting toward the person or activity, reaching toward the person or activity, or vocalizing. Children have many ways of letting you know they would like to continue the interaction. Watch for small hand or body movements that reach toward the person or object. Watch for searching hand or foot movements, a smile, an open mouth. Stay in physical contact (allow him to lean on you or keep his hand on you or sit close enough so your leg is touching his leg). The following cues will tell you when your child has had enough and needs a break: turning away the face or body, leaning back, stiffening, fussing or crying, withdrawing, engaging in self-stimulatory behavior such as head waving or eye poking, closing eyes or mouth, or shifting attention to another object or activity (pulling on a blanket, sucking on fingers, etc.). Reading these cues and responding appropriately is a very important part of early interactions.

**Invent your own games.** Perhaps now she'd rather play one of her favorite games that you and she invented together. You begin at her toes and slowly move your hands up her legs, up her chest, pause at her chin, then continue to her cheeks, ending with a "nose kiss," rubbing your nose and face against hers. Because this is a game you often play together, and always in the same way, she has learned to anticipate

what will happen. You may notice her excitement build as she begins to anticipate the fun “kiss” at the end. Perhaps she starts to move her face back and forth too, or reach up for your face. When you put your hands back on her toes, she might kick her feet indicating she wants to play again.

**Explore the world together (“hand under hand”).** It is very important for family members to remember that if a child has limited vision and hearing that they are not aware that you are both “looking” at the same object or engaging in the same activity (for example, the child may not be aware that other people eat!). Helping your child understand that others are sharing in the same experiences with him is an important factor in building relationships and self-esteem.

The hands of a child who is deafblind become his ears, eyes and voice. If he is exploring a toy, join him by gently placing one of your fingers under part of his hands. Likewise, if you want to show something to a child, encourage him to place his hands over your hands as you move toward the object. This way you can explore together. Then you may gently remove your hand so he can play on his own.

These strategies will send a message to the child that you are joining him and not simply manipulating him. When a child’s hands are being manipulated hand over hand through a task often his reaction will be to pull away. If, however, a child learns to seek out your hands to share and explore, you will naturally be fostering a stronger desire to reach out to you for information and again, building a stronger sense of self-esteem.

**Join your child in her play.** What is interesting or fun for your child? Perhaps she has one of your shiny metal mixing bowls filled with brightly colored mylar paper and she likes to move her hands over the crinkly reflective paper in the bowl. You could sit across from her with your hands partly under hers in the bowl. After she moves her hands in the mylar, you can take a turn crinkling the paper. She will feel the movement of both your hands and the paper beneath her hands and will know that you share her interest. Pause so she may take another turn.

As you take turns back and forth, you are having an early “conversation” about something that is of interest to your child. Initially, your son may accidentally bang his arm down on his sound/light piano toy, not realizing he has caused the sound and the keys to light up. With repeated experiences, however, his movements will become more purposeful as he realizes he made something happen. You can join him in play as you invent a turn-taking game: First, he bangs on the piano, then you take a turn and pause and wait for him to repeat his turn. By joining your child in a movement or activity he likes, by following your child’s lead, and by imitating your child’s movements and/or sounds, you and your child can share many enjoyable “conversations.”

**Encourage use of all sensory information.** Help your child who is deafblind learn to use vision and hearing for functional activities and to interpret the limited sights and sounds that are available. Approach your child gently to let him know you’re available for interaction; do not “surprise” him with unexpected or abrupt touches or sounds. Attend to and imitate any actions and sounds; invite him to take another turn; let him know you share his interests. Offer consistent touch and object cues to signal the beginning of an activity and use movement and body contact during your interactions.

**Adapt the environment.** Create clearly defined spaces for your child to play and explore; provide optimal visual contrast and auditory feedback; include toys and materials with sensory characteristics she will appreciate (e.g., shiny reflective toys such as a mylar balloon, toys with vibration, and easily activated sound toys that provide auditory feedback within his or her range of usable hearing). Objects may be placed where your child can find them—attached to the crib, high chair, or car seat, or in a hanging mobile or some special play space. In this way he or she will not “lose” them. They may also be placed so any movement the child makes produces a result. You need to provide opportunities that not only encourage your child to interact with the environment and the people and objects in it, but also give results of that interaction, so he can make the connection of “I did something. I made that happen.” The little boy who kicks his feet while lying on a water-filled mat may not initially realize that he caused the movement he

feels. However, with repeated experiences— “The mat only moves beneath me when I move”—the child will learn that he can make something happen. This child will become a more active player in the world.

**Monitor levels of stimulation.** Be sensitive to the type and amount of sensory stimulation your child can handle at any given time and adjust activities and materials accordingly. Be sure to monitor or eliminate background noise and confusing visual effects.

**Use appropriate cues.** Use simple, consistent, and respectful cues that will be understandable to your child. Cues should be clearly related to the activity from your child’s perspective and presented just before the activity starts. To let your child know it is bath time, for example, you might dip his foot in the water, sign “bath,” pause to observe his response, then lower him into the tub. In this way your child will learn to anticipate familiar activities; his world will be predictable and interesting; and he will develop a trusting relationship with the people who care for him.

**Expose your child to language.** Children hear a great deal of verbal language long before they learn to talk themselves. Likewise, a young child with deafblindness needs to be involved in an environment that is rich in all forms of communication. This may include words, signs, gestures, touch cues, object cues, movement cues, contextual cues, visual and/or auditory cues. Provide your child with language in any form he can understand. It is important to expose the youngest infant to sign language. When you use object cues, pair them with simple signs. As you respond to your child’s communications, offer him simple signs. As a parent, you instinctively can discriminate between a cry of hunger and a cry of pain. Just as a mother would respond to a baby’s cry by saying, “Oh, you’re hungry,” we must provide the same response using signs so the child will gradually learn that “every time I’m hungry and I cry, mom does this; maybe if I do the same thing I won’t need to cry.

**Help your child interact with others.** As she begins to interact with other children, you can be a facilitator. Help other children learn effective ways to understand and respond. Help them learn how to use

their hands to provide cues and how to use their hands to play together in a respectful way that encourages active participation and exploration by both children.

Playing games is much more than mere play. Through play, your child can learn a great deal:

- Trust and anticipation that certain things will always occur
- How to make things happen
- Ways to ask for help, ask for more, ask to be done
- The power of making choices
- Better understanding of the world
- Communication in its many different forms

### **Helping Your Customers Choose Toys for Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired**

Reprinted with permission from the Toy Industry Foundation, American Foundation for the Blind, and the Alliance for Technology Access.

*Abstract: This article has been reprinted from the Spring 2001 edition of Baby Shop Magazine and was adapted from Guide to Toys for Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (2000-2001), a joint initiative of the Toy Industry Foundation, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the Alliance for Technology Access. It helps parents, teachers, and family members choose appropriate toys for visually impaired children and stresses the importance of learning through play. For a complete copy of the guide, contact the American Federation for the Blind <[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)> or the Toy Industry Foundation <[www.toy-tia.org](http://www.toy-tia.org)>.*

*Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, toys, play, learning, creativity, social skills*

As children, many of us had a favorite toy. Whether it was a stuffed animal, building blocks or a toy car, it inspired our creativity, could entertain us for hours, and was an outlet to explore the world around us. This need for discovery and love of play is a universal part of being a child. While all children have different needs, likes and interests, the desire to play is constant! Play teaches children about themselves, their surroundings, and how to interact with others.

#### Toys and play:

- Inspire children's curiosity to move and explore.
- Promote awareness of people, places and things.
- Encourage communication with others.
- Provide opportunities for social and emotional growth.
- Stimulate children's intellect, imagination and creativity.
- Build skills for recreational activities and sports.

However, it's easy to take for granted how easily these skills are learned through sight. Children with visual impairments need additional support to learn these same skills and become familiar with their environments. Learning to play is the first step in this process and toys are wonderful outlets to open up the world of discovery and play. You can provide a valuable service to your community by becoming knowledgeable about the special needs of visually impaired children. Each toy presents a unique play experience for a child. A toy that encourages one child's creativity and confidence may not be effective to another child. Here are some things to keep in mind when selecting the types of toys that will be most enjoyed by children who are blind or visually impaired and enhance their play experience.

Manufacturers determine the age ranges for their toys for children who are not blind or visually impaired; these ranges may not be appropriate for the children you have in mind. When parents are selecting toys for special needs children make them aware that children

develop skills at varying rates and that a child's own interests and skills are an excellent guide for your choices. They should be imaginative when selecting toys for children with special needs who may enjoy a unique way of having fun with their toys.

Children benefit the most when these toys are combined with playful interaction; parents can be a part of this experience by making play-time a priority! Most importantly, remember there is no substitute for sensible adult supervision of children's play, and that it is advisable to seek input from a physician, occupational or physical therapist if a child with special needs has fine or gross motor impairments, or other health concerns.

Apply these guidelines when helping parents to select toys that are fun and suitable for children who are blind, visually impaired or have special needs.

Parents should consider toys that:

- Talk or produce sounds. Children with visual impairments will benefit from the influx of technology in today's toys. Toys that talk or imitate real life noises attract children's attention to the world of sounds, help them understand cause and effect, and teach them to use auditory senses effectively as they grow.
- Have bright colors, high contrast and emit light. Toys with simple contrasting patterns of lines and shapes that are brightly colored or light up during play stimulate children to use their vision to its best potential.
- Feature a variety of interesting surfaces and textures. Toys that have dials, switches, buttons and other surfaces that are fun to touch and operate encourage children to use their fingers and hands to explore. Textures introduce children to the way everyday objects feel. Interesting, flexible or rubbery surfaces make dolls, rattles, and balls easy to play with and appealing.
- Stimulate thinking and creativity. Puzzles, building toys, and railroads help children discover how parts make up the whole,

and stimulate their imagination to plan and build. Toy letters and numbers marked in Braille and phonics toys introduce children to the wonders of learning through reading. Craft kits and art supplies help enhance creativity.

- Encourage movement and exploration. Climbing and riding toys, athletic equipment and other action toys engage children in movement and exploration. Physical activity promotes the growth of strong muscles for walking, running, and sports; toy rattles, hand puppets and musical toys enhance the development of fine motor and hand skills, and facilitate graceful and easy movement.
- Promote cooperation, sharing and social growth. Games and role-playing activities engage children in play with their friends, family and teachers. Games that encourage cooperation and sharing build the foundation of friendship and relationships with others.
- Develop awareness of people, places, and things. Dolls, stuffed animals, puppets, vehicles and play towns introduce the sights and sounds of daily living, acquaint children with the jobs that people do at home and at work, and stimulate creative role-play.

We hope you find this Guide useful as you help customers to select playthings for the children in their lives. Remember, play-time can be an enriching, educational, and, most importantly, fun activity for all children.

## **A Celebration of Service to Texas Students**

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

*Abstract: This article reviews the history of TSBVI and plans for its Sesquicentennial celebration.*

*Key Words: News & Views, Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Sesquicentennial celebration, blind, visual impairment, deafblind*

The year 2006 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). The School plans to commemorate this achievement throughout the year with a host of activities for former staff, students, parents, professionals and the public. A kick-off program in January, a poetry contest, a track meet, local and visiting museums, a reunion, a drama performance and a tandem bike race will all be part of the year-long celebration. A commemorative 2006 calendar featuring photos from the past and braille wrist bracelets will be on sale. We invite all interested people to join us in these activities and help TSBVI celebrate its fascinating history and place in today's education of children.

Twenty years after Texas gained its independence from Mexico and five years before the Civil War, the Texas legislature created the Institute for the Blind on August 16, 1856, in a far out section of "Waterloo," as the capitol was known at the time. Families made the long trek by horseback and buggy, risking their lives, so that their blind children could attend the school. Not until twenty years after the Blind Asylum opened on the outskirts of town would the first state college, Texas A&M, be established, followed by the University of Texas seven years later.

The School has gone through a series of incarnations from 1856 to the present. As the Blind Asylum on San Gabriel Street near the capitol building, it admitted its first three students, who were expected to work at making brooms and other products while there. The location moved

to the Arno Nowotny Building on what is now the UT Campus in 1857. The name was changed to The Blind Institute in 1905. The school moved to its current location, a 73 acre site on 45<sup>th</sup> Street, in 1916 and the name was changed again to The Texas School for the Blind, with “and Visually Impaired” added in 1989 to reflect the range of students being served. A separate institution, the School for Blind, Deaf & Orphans served black students, and was integrated into the larger schools for the blind or deaf in 1965. The year 1975 marked a turning point in the population served by Texas School for the Blind when the Legislature enacted H.B. 1673 adding statewide responsibilities to the School’s enabling statutes and mission.

The School today is acknowledged as one of the country’s leading schools in the education of blind and visually impaired children. The Curriculum Department publishes books that are used worldwide. The website is one of the most comprehensive in the world in providing information for parents and professionals and is visited by over two million people a year. The staff is highly qualified and experienced in providing for the education of its students in academics, vocational training, daily living skills, and recreation. The School provides a Comprehensive Program for students attending during the school year; a variety of Summer Programs for students who attend their local school districts during the school year; a Short-term Program for students who need short periods of intensive instruction in a specific area; a Post Secondary Program for graduated students who need remedial academics, employment, and adult living experience; and an Outreach Program that serves students, parents and professionals attending local districts throughout the state. TSBVI partners with Regional Education Service Centers, university teacher preparation programs, the Texas Education Agency and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services to meet the needs of Texas’ 7000+ blind and visually impaired students.

The proud history and modern accomplishments of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired will be celebrated throughout 2006 in a series of events.

## **THE CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **January 27, 2006**

- Opening ceremonies begin at 7:00 PM in the School Auditorium and will include speakers, music, student performances, and special and honored guests. A special Sesquicentennial Cake will be provided by David Bull and Mark Chapman of the Driskill Grill.
- Three poetry competitions will be held during the year, one for current students and one for anyone who ever attended the school. Deadline for round one is November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Winners will be announced by Ric Williams of the Austin Chronicle at the January event. For contest rules and regulations, go to <http://www.tsbvi.edu/school/sesq/poetry-all.htm> >.

### **January 27 - 29, 2006**

- South Central Association of Schools for the Blind (SCASB) Track Meet – Schools from six states (Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi & Louisiana) will compete in track and field, cheerleading and arts performance. The public is invited to attend the on-campus event.

### **May 2006**

- 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> - Student Performance of the Annual Spring Play - the public is welcome
- 25<sup>th</sup> - TSBVI Graduation; winner will be announced for Round 2 of the Poetry Competition.

### **August 18 - 20, 2006**

- Memory weekend! Reunion for former students of the School.- musicians, speakers, and sight-seeing tours of TSBVI and it's earlier locations.
- 16<sup>th</sup> – a special commemorative stamp cancellation honoring TSBVI at Austin post offices. Envelopes cancelled with this special postmark will be on sale at the School.

## August and September

- Callahan Traveling Museum Exhibit, on loan from the American Printing House for the Blind of Louisville, Kentucky, presents “In Touch with Knowledge: The Educational History of Blind People.” TSBVI will also create its own museum of Texas artifacts. The public is encouraged to come see this wonderful exhibit and learn more about education of the blind. See <<http://sun1.aph.org/museum/intouch.html>> for more information about this traveling museum coming to Texas in August and September, 2006.

## November 4, 2006

- Parent Weekend - Winner of Round 3 Poetry Contest announced. A Tandem Bicycle Race will be held.

We hope that all of the many friends of TSBVI will attend some or all of these activities. We also would like to have your input about your experiences with or at TSBVI. Please go to <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/school/sesq/memories.htm>> to post them online, or send them to us at the School at 1100 W. 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, Texas 78756.

This sesquicentennial celebration is being sponsored by All Blind Children of Texas (ABCTX), a non-profit organization whose mission is to advance the optimal *physical, mental, emotional* and *social development* of all Texas blind and visually impaired children, and who has a goal of increasing public awareness and appreciation of blind children.

Ongoing information about the Sesquicentennial Celebration can be found on the School’s website at <<http://www.tsbvi.edu>> and the organization’s website at <<http://www.abctx.org>>. If you would like to help sponsor the celebration, donations are appreciated and can be made through the websites or by calling Gloria Bennett at (512) 206-9234.

## **Inspiration in a Challenging Time**

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

*Abstract: In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there are resources for people with blindness and visual impairment to access. The Assistant Commissioner of DARS-DBS shares these resources and offers an end of the year update on the activities of DBS.*

*Key Words: News & Views, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, disability, Hurricane Katrina, Department for Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division for Blind Services*

As I write this, it is just over three weeks since Hurricane Katrina blasted through the Gulf Coast region leaving unspeakable destruction and misery in her wake, and the Gulf Coast waits with uncertainty as Hurricane Rita approaches. The news is full of stories about the people who evacuated, the people who stayed behind, the people who lost everything and are having to rebuild their lives from scratch, and even the poor animals that were left behind.

Something we haven't seen as much coverage of, though, is what happened to the Gulf Coast residents who are blind or have other physical or mental disabilities. We do know two important things. First, we know there are thousands of people with disabilities among the evacuees in Texas and elsewhere. Second, we know that staff from state agencies across Texas has made a special effort to share their extensive knowledge about blindness and other disabilities with disaster relief and emergency preparedness organizations at all levels.

I am not going to dwell on Hurricane Katrina issues in this article, and I'm sure you are already getting good information from a lot of different sources. However, I would like to share some websites that have been useful to me in learning about the ongoing relief efforts and emergency preparedness, especially for people with disabilities.

- [www.hhsc.state.tx.us](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us) — the Texas Health and Human Services Commission website consolidates Katrina information from all the health and human services agencies and provides links to other resources as well.
- <http://www.katrinadisability.info/> — the Katrina Disaster Relief Information for People with Disabilities, including information for people who need help and for those who want to help but need to know how.
- [www.jik.com](http://www.jik.com) — this website provides a comprehensive collection of disaster resources for people with disabilities (the information on this site was compiled by nationally recognized disability policy consultant June Isaacson Kailes).
- <http://www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilities.htm> — this website provides information from the Red Cross and other community-based organizations to help people with disabilities prepare for emergencies.

Before leaving the topic of Katrina entirely, I want to express my extreme pride in being associated with so many wonderful DBS staff members whose response to persons devastated by the hurricane went way beyond the call of duty. The details of all the things they did and all the people they helped, often on their own time and at their own expense, would fill this newsletter. I am never surprised by the caring and generosity of my colleagues — and I'm always inspired.

Speaking of inspired, the year-end program statistics are in, and it appears our Transition, Independent Living, and Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development programs found some special source of inspiration! All three exceeded their program targets for the year in a big way!

In the VR program, we closed the year with numbers that clearly indicate our focus on getting more people who are blind into the competitive job market is working, and the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center staff not only exceeded their anticipated goals but also increased

their outreach efforts to bring CCRC mini-trainings to more local communities across the state.

The Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment (BEST) program continued to provide critical eye screenings and treatment to uninsured Texans throughout the year (don't forget to check that voluntary donation box when you renew your driver's license!), and our Business Enterprises of Texas (BET) ended the 2005 fiscal year with six new facilities and a total of 119 facilities across the state!

I'll spare you a list of all the detailed numbers and statistics (if you're interested in them, feel free to contact me!) and simply express my appreciation for the perseverance and positive attitude of DBS staff in a year marked with many changes and challenges.

For fiscal year 2005, the bottom line is that more blind Texans received important services and supports than we anticipated thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of our staff in all program areas. We're looking forward to 2006 now and, although we know we will likely encounter additional challenges like Katrina, we fully expect to have another banner year!

**The CdLS Foundation DVD/Video "FIND ONE CHILD"  
Is now available!**

Relatively few people have heard of Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, even fewer could identify a child with CdLS. As we learn that the occurrence rate of CdLS is greater than we previously believed, we turn to YOU for help.

We have created a new video presentation that highlights the characteristics of the syndrome and describes the services available through the CdLS Foundation. Interested families and professionals have requested copies to show in their schools, places of worship, and professional circles to educate their friends, colleagues, and community leaders about CdLS. Your willingness to increase awareness of this

syndrome will ensure that no parent or child will face the challenges of CdLS alone.

You can make the difference in a life. Please call us at 1-800-753-2357 or email us at <awareness@cdlsusa.org> to request your FREE copy, or visit our website at <www.cdlsusa.org> for more information.

## **New Study Finds Students With Disabilities Making Great Strides**

U.S. Department of Education Press Release  
<www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2005/07/07282005.html>

*Abstract: U.S. Department of Education report notes significant progress for students with disabilities in their transition to adulthood, as measured by dropout rates, postsecondary enrollment, and gainful employment.*

*Key Words: News & Views, U.S. Department of Education, disability, transition, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, National Longitudinal Transition Study*

Students with disabilities have made significant progress in their transition to adulthood during the past 25 years with lower dropout rates, an increase in postsecondary enrollment and a higher rate of gainful employment after leaving high school, according to a new report released today by the U.S. Department of Education. The report is available at <<http://www.nlts2.org>>.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) documents the experiences of a national sample of students over several years as they moved from secondary school into adult roles. The NLTS2 report shows that the incidence of students with disabilities completing high school rather than dropping out increased by 17 percentage points between 1987 and 2003.

During the same period, their postsecondary education participation more than doubled to 32 percent. In 2003, 70 percent of students with disabilities who had been out of school for up to two years had paying jobs, compared to only 55 percent in 1987.

NLTS2 began in 2001, and is a follow-up to the first National Longitudinal Transition Study conducted from 1985 through 1993, in which the experiences of the first “cohort” of students were analyzed. NLTS2 reports on a second cohort of young people, 12,000 students nationwide who were ages 13-16 at the start of the study. Information will be collected over 10 years from parents, students and schools, and will provide a national picture of the experiences and achievements of young people as they transition into early adulthood.

The study also shows that the following progress has been made in special education:

**Core Academics Improved**—Cohort2 high school students with disabilities were much more likely than their cohort1 counterparts to take core academic courses, including mathematics, science, social studies and a foreign language.

**Grades Were Higher**—Regarding academic performance, more than half of cohort2 students with disabilities received above-average grades, representing a shift from students receiving mostly Cs to more students receiving mostly As or Bs, as reported by teachers.

**Age and Grade-Level Match Improved**—The proportion of students who were at the typical age for their grade level increased from one-third to more than one-half between 1987 and 2001. As being older than the typical age for a grade level has been shown to be a powerful predictor of disabled students dropping out of school, this indicator signals positive outcomes for youths with disabilities in their efforts to finish high school.

**More Support**—By 2001, half of 15- to 17-year-old students with disabilities were receiving related or support services from or through their schools, compared with less than one-third of students in 1987.

The study was funded by the Department’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and focuses on a wide range of important topics for students with disabilities, such as high school coursework, extracurricular activities, academic performance, postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living and community participation.

*Editor's Note: Here are some interesting statistics from American Foundation for the Blind website <[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)>.*

- *Approximately 93,600 visually impaired or blind students, 10,800 of whom are deafblind, are served in the special education program.*
- *Approximately 32% of legally blind working-age Americans are employed.*
- *Approximately 5,500 legally blind children use braille as their primary reading medium.*
- *Approximately 45% of individuals with severe visual impairment or blindness have a high school diploma, compared to 80% among fully sighted individuals. Among high school graduates, those with severe visual impairment or blindness are about as likely to have taken some college courses as those who were sighted, but they are less likely to have graduated.*
- *Approximately 32% of legally blind working-age Americans are employed.*

## **Get Up and Go**

Hadley School for the Blind Press Release, September 8, 2004

*Abstract: A press release describing a new course on independent travel.*

*Key Words: News & Views, Hadley School, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, travel, transportation, independence*

Have you given up your car keys because of visual impairment? Kudos to you—such a decision is often very difficult, as car keys seem so entwined with independence. Or, as a non-driver, have you wondered how you were going to get where you need to go? Hadley's new course "Going Places" is for you! Available in large print, Braille, cassette and online, this tuition-free course will help you establish your ability to travel independently.

This course familiarizes you with various transportation issues in North America. It covers the personal and social aspects of being a non-driver. Then it examines the practical implications involved with using alternative means of transportation. It also focuses on specific methods of transportation: walking and biking, public transit and paratransit, as well as taxis and hired drivers. Various issues, like the planning and safety involved with each method of transportation, are explored.

“Being a non-driver should not hamper your independence,” says instructor Ginger Irwin. “As you will see, many travel options exist. In fact, you may soon feel quite positive about your non-driver status.” This course is open to students in the Adult Continuing Education and High School Programs. Why not enroll in this course now so you can go places with confidence? To do so, just call Student Services at 800.526.9909.

Founded in 1920, The Hadley School for the Blind is one of the largest worldwide educators of persons who are visually impaired. Hadley offers over 90 tuition-free courses to eligible students. The school’s students, 10,000 annually, are from all corners of the United States and more than 100 countries. Courses are available to students who are visually impaired, family members and professionals. Visit us on the Web at <[www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu)>.

### **Lions Affordable Hearing Aid Project (AHAP)**

Excerpts from <[www.lionsear.org](http://www.lionsear.org)> website

*Abstract: Lions Club International Foundation announces development of high quality, affordable hearing aid for income-eligible individuals.*

*Key Words: News & Views, Lions Club International, hearing aids, Lions Affordable Hearing Aid Project, blind, visually impaired, deaf, deafblind*

In 1925, Lions accepted the challenge posed by Helen Keller to help persons who are deaf as well as those who are blind. Lions are involved in a wide spectrum of hearing activities, including recycling hearing aids, provision of

hearing aids to individuals, hearing awareness and screenings, sign language classes, recreational camps, hearing dogs, and international medical missions.

Lion Club International Foundation (LCIF), the grant-making arm of Lions Club International, has partnered with Project Impact to develop and manufacture the world's highest quality, affordable hearing aid – branded as the “Lions Affordable Hearing Aid.” A clinical trial of this device confirmed that the Lions affordable hearing aid is of superior quality and compares favorably to aids costing \$1000 US and more.

Responding to the global problem of hearing impairment, Lions are making available low-cost, quality hearing aids to people who could not otherwise afford them. The Lions Affordable Hearing Aid Project is for low-income people both in developing nations such as India and developed nations such as the United States.

The Lions Affordable Hearing Aid Project is based on the idea of a continuum of care, which includes cooperating with hearing care professionals, serving the low-income individual and combining resources. Through the Lions AHAP, LCIF is distributing the hearing aid at a cost of \$90-\$120 (depending on volume ordered). The hearing aids, software and manuals are shipped directly to audiologists or board certified hearing instrument specialists. The price does not include fees for hearing tests, ear molds, batteries and hearing aid fittings.

The LionsEar is available through both existing and new Lions hearing programs. Existing programs are defined as those that already provide hearing aids in cooperation with hearing care professionals and have a process in place for identifying eligible recipients. New Lions hearing programs are those that are interested in distributing the LionsEar hearing aid, but do not have an existing structure in place. LCIF will assist Lions clubs and districts that wish to begin distributing the aid.

## **“So the World May Hear”**

Starkey Hearing Systems NEWS & VIEWS NOW Program  
Excerpted from THE STARKEY HEARING FOUNDATION Website  
<[www.sotheworldmayhear.org](http://www.sotheworldmayhear.org)>

*Abstract: Starkey Laboratories program provides low-cost hearing aids.*

*Key Words: News & Views, Starkey Laboratories, hearing aids, deaf, hearing impaired, deafblind*

Starkey Laboratories, the world's largest manufacturer of hearing implements, through its HEAR NOW Program, assists individuals who are residents of the United States and qualify under the National Poverty Guidelines for assistance. Since 1995, HEAR NOW has provided more than 65,000 children and adults with hearing aids when they otherwise wouldn't have been able to afford them. HEAR NOW accepts donations of old, used and no longer used hearing aids. Donated aids are sold to a repair lab, and money generated through these sales is used to purchase the aids used in the program's hearing aid assistance program. This Program allows persons with low income to purchase a hearing aid for the cost of the application process (\$100 for one and \$200 for two). **To apply for Hear Now Aid, download an application** at the Starkey website, <[www.sotheworldmayhear.org](http://www.sotheworldmayhear.org)>. Click on “HEAR NOW” and follow the link to the application. If you have questions or do not have access to the internet, call 800-648-4327.

## **Department of Education Proposes Rules for NIMAS**

Excerpted from the Federal Register Announcement  
<<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/05-12853.htm>>

*Abstract: U.S. Department of Education proposes establishment of National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard as required under IDEIA.*

*Key Words: News & Views, National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, NIMAS, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, Braille, large print*

On June 29, 2005, the Department of Education proposed to establish the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The purpose of NIMAS is to help increase the availability and timely delivery of print instructional materials in accessible formats to blind or other persons with print disabilities in elementary and secondary schools.

The adoption of NIMAS is expected to be highly valuable to students who are blind or who have print disabilities because they will have access to accessible versions of textbooks in a timely manner. Current methods of converting print textbooks into Braille and other specialized formats are complex and time consuming, and the process can take months to complete. In many cases students who are blind or who have print disabilities now receive accessible textbooks and other instructional materials well after the beginning of the instructional period. The adoption of the NIMAS will improve both the speed of the process and the quality and consistency of books converted into specialized formats.

Currently states use electronic files from publishers of educational materials to produce accessible versions (e.g., Braille or digital audio) of these materials or contract to have accessible versions produced from these files. Because States have different requirements for these electronic files, however, publishers often experience increased costs for production, and States experience delays and inconsistencies in the materials produced.

To address these concerns, the Department funded the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (NCAC) at the Center on Applied Special Technologies, Inc. (CAST) to establish technical specifications for a voluntary national instructional materials accessibility standard. The panel developed, with consensus, a common standard for digital source files that can be used to accurately and reliably produce instructional materials in a variety of alternate formats using the same source file. This standard, known as the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS, version 1.0), provides a single, uniform format that can be used for the electronic files associated with instructional materials. The Department announced the establishment of the NIMAS as a voluntary standard on July 27, 2004. Additional information on the standard and the expert panel's report is available at <<http://nimas.cast.org/about/index.html>>.

This notice proposes to establish the NIMAS and a separate rulemaking proceeding will be conducted to require States to adopt the standard. The notice proposes to establish NIMAS in the regulations by adding an appendix that will set forth the technical elements and specifications for the standard.

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## **C L A S S I F I E D**

Mail or email your new classified to Karen Scanlon:  
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756 or  
<karens Scanlon@tsbvi.edu>

An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is posted at  
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm>

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### **Getting a Life: Transition Planning for Students with Deafblindness November 12-13, 2005 Austin, Texas**

This two-day workshop will include information for families and professionals. November 12th will offer general information on how to do effective transition planning for a student who is deafblind. November 11th will be a workday for families to discuss and record their ideas about their child's future goals. Professionals may attend this second day only if they are working with a family that is attending. Students may attend with their parents only if they can fully participate in the lecture and planning discussions. No child care is available on site, though limited reimbursement for childcare at home is available to families.

For information contact: Beth Bible  
512-206-9103  
<bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

# **Intervener Training Opportunities**

## **Statewide Intervener Training**

**January 16-17, 2006 in Austin, TX**

Interveners and team members are invited to participate in this two-day workshop. Limited travel assistance is available for the intervener and a team member.

### **New Intervener Training**

Look for announcements about the June, 2006 training for all new interveners in the next See/Hear.

For information contact: Beth Bible

512-206-9103

<bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

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## **2006 Usher Syndrome**

### **Family Retreat**

**January 14-15, 2006**

**at Texas School for the Deaf in Austin, Texas**

Sponsored by

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired - Deafblind Outreach  
and Texas School for the Deaf

This special weekend will help parents, siblings, and school-aged children with Usher Syndrome learn strategies and resources for living with Usher Syndrome.

For information contact: Beth Bible

(512) 206-9103

<bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

# **INSITE Training**

## **A Home-Based Model for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers who are Multiply Disabled and Sensory Impaired**

Six days of training for school and ECI professionals working with families who have children birth-5 years of age. Topics include information on vision and hearing loss, motor development, communication, Active Learning and working with families.

This workshop will take place at two different locations in 2006. Dates and locations will be announced in the next edition of See/Hear.

Interested in bringing INSITE training to your area in 2006-2007? Contact Gigi Newton at 512-206-9272 or email [giginewton@tsbvi.edu](mailto:giginewton@tsbvi.edu).

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## **TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOPS AT TSBVI**

**Presenters: TSBVI Staff  
TSBVI Conference Center, Austin, TX**

Registration forms and information are available on line at  
<<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/tech-workshop.htm>>

### **Low Tech, No Tech Math Adaptations January 20, 2006**

What do you do with students before they are in high school algebra and geometry? What adaptations are available to support concept develop at the elementary and middle school level? This session will discuss those adaptations and how to support your students in math class. We will include some discussion of adaptations to support consumer and functional math skills, as well. We will NOT be discussing the Accessible Graphing Calculator (AGC) nor Scientific Notebook!

Registration for this session is limited and is first-come, first-served. There is a registration fee of \$50.

**Technology and the Language Arts for  
Students with Visual Impairments  
February 3 - 4, 2006**

This session will discuss how technology, both low and high, can support reading and writing skills for students who use braille, students who have low vision, and students with multiple impairments, including a visual impairment. Participants will have the opportunity to see a variety of adaptations and hear about how to incorporate the use of these adaptations into instruction.

Registration for this session is limited and is first-come, first-served. There is a registration fee of \$75.

For information contact: Karen Scanlon  
512-206-9314  
karensanlon@tsbvi.edu

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## **TSBVI TETN Training Events**

**Self-Determination Resources for Students with Visual  
Impairments (TETN # 12416)**

**December 8, 2005 from 1:30-3:30 PM**

Presenter, Dr. KC Dignan, TSBVI Outreach

**What's Cooking? (TETN # 12418)**

**January 18, 2006 from 1:30-3:30 PM**

Presenters:

Holly Cooper & Kate Moss, TSBVI Outreach

**Adaptive PE for Students with Visual Impairments, Including  
Multiple Impairments (TETN # 12417)**

**February 15, 2006 from 1:30-3:30 PM**

Presenters: Elina Mullen & Joe Paschall, TSBVI

Contact your Regional Education Service Center for more information about accessing these broadcasts.

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### **Other Training Events**

**Overview of ASL & Sign Systems**

**(TETN # 11784)**

**January 2, 2006 from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

**AI Issues for Itinerant Teachers (TETN # 11645)**

**February 2, 2006 from 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

**AI Issues for Parent Advisors (TETN# 11646)**

**February 2, 2006 from 1:00 - 4:00 PM**

Contact your Regional Education Service Center or local Regional Day School Program for the Deaf for more information.

### **Save These Dates!**

April 6-8, 2006 Texas AER: Our Futures are Bright

Location: Corpus Christi, TX

For information, go to <<http://www.txaer.org/>>

July 13-19, 2006 AER International Conference

Location: Snowbird, Utah

For more information, go to <[www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org)>

# SEE/HEAR

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Contributions to the newsletter can be mailed or emailed to section editors at:

TSBVI Outreach  
1100 West 45th Street  
Austin, Texas 78756

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

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December 1st for the Winter edition

March 1st for the Spring edition

June 1st for the Summer edition

September 1st for the Fall edition

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