

SEE/HEAR

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

**A collaborative effort of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FAMILY

Watching My Girls Navigate Their World Together.....3

Over There.....9

The Simple Things Are Never Really Simple.....12

A Parent's Perspective and Reflections

 From Capitol Hill: The AFB Josephine

 L. Taylor Leadership Institute.....16

Your Glasses Must Be on Your Face

 (Not in Your Trombone Case).....19

Is My Child Getting a Quality VI Program?.....20

PROGRAMMING

Screening Students for O&M Training Needs29

Orientation and Mobility Training for Students Who Are

 Deafblind: Going Beyond the Blue Book36

The Early Braille Readers Project.....	42
Summer of Sights: Summer Enrichment Program For Students with Visual Impairments.....	49

NEWS & VIEWS

Our Commitment to Children With Multiple Disabilities	56
Assessment CD-rom Now Available in Spanish.....	62
IDEA Reauthorization Update.....	64
Air Travel Hotline	68
Tell Me Service, 1-800-555-8355.....	71
Head of Deafblind Medicaid Waiver Retires.....	72
Invitation to Participate in a Community of Practice on Interveners.....	73

CLASSIFIED

Regional, State and National Training Listings and Events.....	78
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Section Editor’s Introduction: *Family Section Editor’s Introduction: Continuing in our series of highlighting ways families work on expanded core curriculum skills, this edition focuses on orientation and mobility (O&M). O&M is generally described as specific training to help a child who is blind or visually impaired know where he is in his environment and where he wants to go (orientation). It also helps him be able*

to carry out a plan to get there (mobility). The daily routines families have—whether it be doing chorus at home, playing at the neighborhood park or shopping at the mall—provide the ideal opportunity for kids with visual impairments to practice their O&M skills, and in turn, develop confidence in their ability to be safe and independent travelers. Probably the greatest challenge of parents is maintaining the important balance between keeping their children safe while allowing for some minor bumps and bruises. As the old saying goes, sometimes the best lessons learned are the ones you’ve learned the hard way.all children, including those who may not follow traditional work paths. For some individuals, like Brandy and Gene, career education means preparing for the world of work. For others, like Corry, Melanie and Keith’s children, career education expands its focus to preparing for a self-determined life-style in adult life.

Watching My Girls Navigate Their World Together

By Vicki Goodnight, Parent, Spring, TX

Abstract: The author shares the lessons she’s learned about orientation and mobility and how she felt recently when her daughters ventured beyond her expectations.

Key Words: blind, family, expanded core curriculum, orientation and mobility

It’s amazing to me the issues that each new year brings being the parent of a visually/physically impaired child. How many things we each take for granted every day, even

knowing that as parents of our “special” kids we pay extra close attention to these kiddos and what they do daily. This past school year has been an incredible learning experience, not just for my children, but for my husband and me as well.

We have three glorious daughters, our sweet, inquisitive and very active five-year-old Elizabeth, the very lovely, kindhearted and extremely shy Brittany and our tell-it-like-it-is, fun loving Dani. Both Dani and Brittany are thirteen. They are very involved in school and, of course, boys and are as close as twins even if they are stepsisters. There is one major difference though, Dani is visually and physically impaired and is in a wheelchair. That doesn't stop them from doing everything together and they are probably even more creative than most kids their age because of it. But as they have gotten older, watching them spread their wings together has taught me a lesson this year. This was one lesson that scared me to death.

Dani has a power wheelchair (a freedom for which I am eternally grateful) that she got at the end of second grade, four years ago. Though she is visually impaired, she has enough sight to maneuver a chair (another of those eternally grateful things). It took about a month from the time we received the chair to realize that even though she could now go wherever she wanted, whenever she wanted (almost), she didn't. She stayed in one spot until someone directed her to “go...turn right...backup,” you get the idea. At that time Dani was already receiving VI services through school and I mentioned this problem to her VI teacher. She suggested that Dani might need an O&M Evaluation. Well, after explaining to

me what yet another acronym meant”— O&M stood for Orientation & Mobility—I thought it sounded great! You mean that there is a specialist that can work with our daughter to make sure she understands directionality, the space in which she moves and the movement itself? Wow! Yes! Sign us up! So, of course we had an ARD on this and determined that Dani did need such a program, even if only an evaluation to begin with, because as we all know, you can't get a service without first having an evaluation.

They came and did this evaluation and then suggested Dani needed brightly colored cue cards to lead her around the school. These cards showed her where to stop for class, where the nurse was, the door to outside, etc. These signs were neon colored and placed where Dani's field of vision would be. That was it. That was what Dani's O&M evaluation provided. Such a simple little change that no one thought to try before and guess what? It worked, for a while that is.

Blessedly, I discovered TSVBI this year and our family has benefited in so many ways throughout the year because of them. Going in to all the ways would be a book so I'll talk about what is relevant for us now. Through TSVBI, I have found the ability to keep searching until I find what Dani needs, the ability to actually say “my daughter is visually impaired” and most importantly putting those two things together and realizing that there is help out there from those who have done this before. We aren't as alone as we thought.

Well, I started this story talking about Dani and Brittany growing up. You see, I have realized this year how Dani has compensated to deal with her vision impairment and the mobility issue. At school Dani traverses mainly empty hallways and has those visual cues especially for her. At home she has a lifetime of knowledge of how to get around. Outside those front doors however, is a whole world of places with no brightly colored signs designed to lead her around, no well worn wheelchair path in the carpet and millions of corners without the telltale gouges in the drywall from close encounters with a 350 pound power chair. Dani has let her sister be her guide—her eyes to the world if you will. Brittany will stand between her and the curb or hold her hand over Dani's to guide her through crowded spaces making sure to keep Dani and others safe.

Just last weekend the two, joined by a friend, decided to go to the Eckerd's at the front of our subdivision by themselves. When I told them they could walk up there, you would have thought they had won the lottery they were so excited. Into their room they went to collect money, and of course, fix hair and makeup because we all know how important it is to look your best when going for a thirty-minute walk in the 93-degree heat. They packed up a bag with water, a cell phone and snacks (taking snacks when you are headed to the store is also a must). Well, my husband and I had errands to run as well and left before they were ready to go. Halfway between our second and third stop I chickened out. I couldn't help thinking that it's too hot for Dani and she won't know to tell Brittany, they'll need something and I won't be there... yada, yada, yada. I finally begged my husband to go home so we could at least drop the girls off at Eckerd's. Surely, it would be

just as fun if they just walked home after being at Eckerd's alone, right?? I was wrong, but close.

After dropping them off at the store, we continued our errands. Two hours later, I still had not heard from them that they had made it safely home. As I once again am making my husband speed across town towards home, I called them on my cell phone and Brittany answers the phone, obviously out of breath but otherwise fine saying they were almost home. "What! You were at Eckerd's for two hours??" The reply I received scared the daylights out of me. Brittany said that they finished at Eckerd's a long time ago and crossed the road to go to the pharmacy on the other side. At first I thought that this was no big deal because I knew that they would be crossing roads while heading either to or from the store. Then it struck me that the road they had to cross was a major four lane road with a turning lane and no crosswalks. My heart did not quit pounding for days (as a matter of fact I am doing deep breathing exercises with a paper sack right now). Upon my arrival home, I discovered that not only did they enjoy the pleasures of shopping, and cross a major road they had no business being near, but they also added to their adventure by stopping at a pizza parlor on the opposite corner on the way home. (Yes, that meant they crossed the same busy intersection again.) Other than being grounded for the next century for doing things that were so obviously against the rules that they did not need to be verbalized, they survived. Despite the terrible fear that I experienced after the fact, I did realize they are growing up and remembered what it was like to find freedom at that age.

Though it warms my heart to see these girls so close, another thought recently struck home: Brittany is not always going to walk beside her sister! The time is fast approaching that their wings are going to spread in different directions, they will fly to different ends of the earth and Dani needs to be able to face those curbs alone.

As my husband and I contemplate the monumental task of teaching Dani how to navigate through a sea of blur in a world dominated by cues for the non-visually-impaired people, I remember that long-ago experience when I first heard the VI teacher explaining O&M to me. Empowered by the memory and armed with new knowledge gained from the oodles of information shared by TSVBI, I decide that its time to request more services from the O&M specialist. It's time for our daughter to learn how to make her way in the world.

She needs to learn to navigate this world so she can do what all girls her age do: go to the mall; go to the movies; hang out at the skating rink; or even just take a walk down the street to check out the cute new boy who just moved in. These are skills that our other children learned by watching (OK, not checking out the new boy) but Dani needs to be taught. Though I know we are ultimately responsible for her knowledge, I also know that some tasks are more than we can handle alone and that there are people out there trained to do this who want to help us.

It took us thirteen years to realize (and accept) this need and we have a lot of catching up to do to prepare Dani for her future. I'm just appreciative of all the lessons we learned this year and look forward to facing the new ones we've yet to discover!

Over There

By Cathy Anne Murtha, Access Technology Trainer,
Sacramento, CA

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Abstract: An amusing take on some difficulties the author encounters while asking for directions.

Key Words: blind, family, personal experience, expanded core curriculum, orientation and mobility

Editor's Note: The following article was written by Cathy Anne Murtha, an Access Technology Trainer who specializes in teaching blind individuals how to access their computers. Her amusing take on some of the difficulties she's encountered when receiving directions is a wonderful reminder to everyone of the importance of avoiding vision-based terms when giving directions to individuals that are blind or visually impaired. The article has been published in several countries and by several of the affiliates of ACB and NFB in their newsletters. Cathy says she wrote it when she was in college, not thinking that it would be so appreciated by the community. Cathy Anne may be reached at <<http://www.accesstechnologyinstitute.com/intouch.html>>.

As my guide dog and I stood in line at the checkout of the River City Market at CSUS, I asked the cashier what I considered a simple question. "Where are the napkins please?" Her response was hurried, but sincere, "Over there."

Emerging from the light rail for the first time, I managed to catch the attention of a passerby. "Please sir, can you tell me where I might catch bus 63?" A kind voice offered a pleasant

response before disappearing into the cacophony of the early afternoon, “You can catch it ‘over there’.”

So many things reside over there — napkins, bus stops, pencils, pens, clothing racks, department stores and even my shoes! A never ending supply of important and indispensable items and locales all reside in this place which is shrouded in mystery and intrigue.

I stand in perplexed silence after learning that something is over there. It is a place I have never been and have no hope of finding on my own.

My guide dog is quite skilled in finding chairs, stairs, elevators, escalators, helping me cross streets, and can even find me the Diet Pepsi display at Food Town; however, when I tell her to find “over there” her little bottom hits the floor and a small whimper tells me that she is as confused as I.

We will not be going “over there” today. Over there has caused me a bit of vexation, a lot of confusion and, on occasion, made my heart race.

I have discovered that “over there” can be a dangerous place. One day, while crossing a street, I heard a driver’s irritated voice shout out a warning of a truck bearing down on me from over there. Shadow artfully dodged the oncoming vehicle and pulled me to the safety of the curb. Our hearts were both racing as we took a few moments to compose ourselves.

Close encounters with over there can be frightening experiences.

Although many blind people have wondered as to the exact location of “over there,” few have dared to venture forth in an actual exploration of the mysterious place.

One day, while standing in line at the supermarket, I asked the clerk where I might find the aspirin. With a cheery smile in her voice, she informed me that the aspirin was located “over there.” With a weary sigh, I decided that I would take the extra step that would unravel the mystery, which had vexed my compatriots since the beginning of time.

Taking a deep breath, and attempting to look nonchalant, I smiled at the clerk, “Where,” I asked, “is over there?” I imagined the girl’s shocked expression. I felt her sharing condescending and concerned looks with her fellows in the store. The silence grew palpable as they mulled the possibility of allowing a blind person access to the forbidden land.

She had no choice; she would have to tell me how to find “over there!” I had won! Exhilaration swept through me as I waited in breathless anticipation.

A victorious smile crept to my lips, my hand tightened on the handle of Shadow’s harness; we would soon be going over there! The clerk’s voice reeked with resignation as the decision was made. “That way,” she said.

The Simple Things Are Never Really Simple...

By Shawna Mann, Parent, Mabank, TX

Abstract: A mother discusses her sons' journey toward independence, and the importance of teams working together to support a child, and support one another as well.

Key Words: visually impaired, family, expanded core curriculum, independence, teams, advocacy

I stood next to the salad bar at the Golden Corral tonight and watched my son, Ben, maneuver his way back to our table. I'm sure those around me thought I was crazy as the tears streamed uncontrollably down my cheeks. He cautiously counted tables as he held his plate tightly in both hands. His feet took such careful steps that no one around him could have guessed he is visually impaired. I held my breath as he stopped next to the row that held our table. I watched him listen carefully as he slowly scanned the row. There was nothing in his sight to distinguish our table from the other four. He stood for a minute and then softly called "Mom?"

I wiped my eyes and stepped toward him. He recognized me immediately. "It's the second one," I told him softly. His face beamed as he moved to our table and took his seat. This was a victory. He had safely and successfully made his way across a crowded restaurant carrying his own plate. It's a simple thing, really. Kids his age do it all the time. So why was I crying?

We have three beautiful children. Our daughter, Kaelin, is nine, Ben is seven, and our youngest son, Logan, is five. Ben

and Logan are affected with x-linked juvenile retinoschisis. They are both considered legally blind. One of the greatest things I have learned from my children is there are no “simple things”.

Ben’s unescorted trek across the restaurant was the culmination of five years of hard work. We have always pushed the boys to be independent. We preach self advocacy on a daily basis. As parents, that is our job. However, our boys would not be where they are today without the collaboration of some incredible teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators.

In the beginning, there were Linda Ashmore and Tressie Schindler. Ben was three, Logan was one. They not only taught the boys, they taught the rest of the family as well. Kaelin began learning Braille and the art of being a sighted guide at the tender age of five. Words of encouragement and reassurances that this was “normal” were plentiful. Ben received services during his PPCD class. Logan received services at home. Both teachers made every minute count. They collaborated with each other and both of them reinforced the other’s goals for each lesson.

Ms. Ashmore reinforced Ms. Schindler’s O&M lessons by allowing Ben to navigate the maze of halls through the school before each Braille lesson. Ben also received OT for fine motor skills and speech. Both teachers planned activities into their lessons that reinforced what the OT and speech therapist were doing as well.

When Logan was two, Ms. Schindler began taking him on O&M field trips once a month. One of his favorite places was the local grocery store. The week before the trip, Ms. Ashmore provided enlarged pictures of various fruits and vegetables with their names in both large print and Braille. Then Ms. Schindler brought a school bus to the house in order to take us. Once there, Logan was asked to locate and match items to the pictures. We still play this “game” each time I go shopping. He is probably the only five year old who can recite the layout of the produce section.

Unfortunately, after two years, my husband’s job changed and we moved to Region X. However, we were once again blessed when Ms. Sandra Greenman came into our lives. Logan started PPCD. Ben started kindergarten. She collaborated with both classroom teachers to ensure that they received as much from each day as possible.

Logan became such a powerful self advocate that we had to ask to him to tone it down. He spoke up very loudly whenever there was something he could not see. She worked with us, the PPCD teacher, and Logan to explain the importance of self advocacy as well as the polite way to handle it.

Ben also thrived under her instruction. His Braille took off and he learned to navigate the new school quickly. She knew just how hard to push without frustrating him. When he was worried that the CCTV made him “weird,” she collaborated with the classroom teacher to make it “cool.” In March of his first grade year, however, something odd began to occur. I began getting daily reports from her that Ben was excessively tired. I backed up his bedtime and didn’t think anything of it.

She called again two weeks later to report that he was still fatigued. I voiced a concern that he was using this as an excuse to get out of work. She didn't agree and encouraged me to take him for a checkup. Ben was severely anemic. The guilt I felt was overwhelming, but it didn't last long. She quickly offered support and ideas for helping him get through it without falling too far behind.

Once again, we find ourselves starting anew in yet another district. We have been blessed with a whole new group of professionals. So far, everyone has been wonderful. Both boys (and both parents) have made the transition without any major issues. I credit this to the expertise of each and every one of their current and former teachers.

I've heard the saying "it takes a village to raise a child." When it comes to special needs children, it takes a team. Each and every member of the team is equally important. If any part of that team breaks down, huge gaps develop in the child's development. It is also important for each of the team members to support each other. The family must support the TVI and O&M. In turn, they must support the family. As paraprofessionals and classroom teachers are added, they must also be welcomed as part of the team. Most importantly, they must all support the child.

Horror stories in special education are abundant. As an advocate for parents, I have heard many of them. One of the most common complaints is a complete breakdown in support of the other team members. Teachers become focused on their issues and don't consider what the family is dealing with and vice versa. As parents, we must

advocate for our children. However, we must also keep an open mind in listening to other team members' ideas and opinions. It's easy to remember to voice our dissatisfaction, but it is vital that we remember to praise our teachers. Teachers must remember to give family members an occasional pat on the back as well.

We may all come from different areas of expertise, but our goals are the same. We want to raise a well adjusted, well educated, confident young adult. With the support of some incredible teachers, I know that navigating crowded restaurants will get easier for Ben. I know that Logan will not have a problem shopping for his own groceries. I know that both boys will grow to be happy, independent adults. I also know that as parents, we will survive.

A Parent's Perspective and Reflections from Capitol Hill: The AFB Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute

By Laura Boenig, TAPVI Co-Chair, Portland, TX

Abstract: This article gives a summary of the AFB Josephine L Taylor Leadership Institute, which was held in Washington, DC in March.

Key Words: blind, family, conference, advocacy

I recently had the privilege of being invited to attend the American Foundation for the Blind's Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute that was held in Washington DC in

March, 2004. It was with gratitude and enthusiasm that I accepted.

I found out that our Washington leaders were misinformed as to what is happening in our nation concerning the special education system. Panel members discussed such things as parents regularly attending initial individual education plan meeting with lawyers in tow and discipline needing to be the same for every child regardless of their disability. One of the panelists stated that special education teams have checklists that are checked off as the child learns a particular skill, and that a three-year Individual Education Plan will help because teams will be forced to look further into the child's future.

After listening to all the presentations, I am now aware that we as parents need to help our nation's leaders understand the parent's point of view. The No Child Left Behind law and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) together will greatly influence whether our visually impaired children get the education they deserve, including appropriate materials in a timely manner. It is critical for parents to have a voice in decision-making. Our leaders are not aware that we struggle every day to have our children receive an appropriate education. They don't know that we give the school months — and sometimes years — to fix problems before resorting to legal action. Nor do they understand that giving a student an individual education plan in the 1st grade and not reevaluating him or her for three years may not identify modifications and skills needed to keep up with his peers. It is our duty as parents to inform them of our experiences and let them know why we feel it is so vital that our child's needs be met. Until

we, parents who understand special education, inform them, they will continue to be misguided.

The information that was presented to me spoke volumes on who has the leaders' attention. It is not the parent or those working so hard in classrooms with our children. I believe it is the people running the special education system and the administrators who handle the money. We can help our leaders understand the barriers our children face so that they are not left behind. It will take us working together with other advocates, agencies that serve the visually impaired, and our association memberships to make a difference. One thing that was consistently said was that parents make the most impact on our leaders, by providing personal experiences. We need to write letters to our leaders explaining what we need and why we need it.

You may know that the blindness field is faced with a critical legislative year in 2004. To ensure that children who are blind or have low vision receive comprehensive education services appropriate for their unique needs, the field of blindness will need to continue to be diligent in educating and advocating for appropriate services to school personnel, policy makers, and the general public. Keep up-to-date on public awareness and advocacy activities by joining Choices for Children (CFC). This is an important field-initiated campaign consisting of individuals and organizations representing adult consumers, parents, and students with visual impairments, and professionals who teach and assist them. Go to <www.afb.org/idea.asp> to find the membership form for Choices for Children or contact CFC cochair, Mary Ann Siller from AFB at <siller@afb.net>.

Another important resource is the American Foundation for the Blind's Words from Washington. This is a free biweekly electronic legislative newsletter from AFB's Policy, Research and Technology Group. It focuses on the most significant legislative and policy issues of interest to the blindness community currently being addressed in Washington, D.C. Review back issues here and subscribe to Words from Washington via e-mail at <www.afb.org> through the advocacy section and more specifically at <http://www.afb.org/info_documents.asp?collectionid=3>.

Your Glasses Must Be on Your Face (Not in Your Trombone Case)

By Virginia H. Owen, Retired Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, and Jacob's Grandmother, Houston, TX

Abstract: A grandparent relates her family's adventure of keeping up with her grandson's eyeglasses.

Key Words: blind, family, personal experience, eyeglasses, organizational skills

Jacob, a 5th grader, had misplaced his glasses again. His parents were not thrilled at the prospect of having to buy another pair. He is a responsible student by nature, but he has a characteristic of being forgetful.

Being in the stage of preadolescence, it is very important to look like the other students. As he sees it, wearing glasses sets him apart from his classmates. Jacob knows that he has a serious visual limitation, but would rather keep the glasses

off than to wear them for schoolwork. In Middle School, it is very important to a student to appear “cool.”

As instructed by his parents, he did a search of all the places at school where they might be. The glasses did not turn up. His mother went to the school and did a search herself—to his locker, to the Lost & Found, to the classrooms, to the Band Room. She did not find them. Things became tense at home.

Then Jacob had a light bulb moment. “I think I know where they are! They’re in my trombone case!” He raced to the room where he liked to practice trombone, and there were the glasses, safely tucked away in the case. That saved the day, and Jacob was out of hot water.

Since I am his grandmother, and not the authority figure in his life, I can do a little teasing with him, while still trying to make a point. “Jacob, your glasses should be on your face, not in the trombone case,” I told him. He grinned at me in a sheepish way, which made me know that he was listening to me. His parents and I hope so.

Is My Child Getting a Quality VI Program?

By Cyral Miller, Outreach Director, TSBVI

Abstract: This article provides families with some guidelines to help assess if the IEP is meeting the vision-related needs of a child with a visual impairment.

Key Words: family, visual impairment, IEP, services, quality, guidelines, QPVI

Have you ever wondered whether there is a measurement system for how your child's program is meeting VI specific educational needs? How would you know whether these aspects of programming are truly "quality"? Among all the buzz about educational standards and accountability, how can you tell whether your child's unique needs related to the visual impairment are being met?

While every child is different, the reason that your child is eligible for special education in the category "visual impairment" is that his or her visual functioning requires specialized services. Parents are - by law - members in the team which must meet at least annually to determine whether your child is eligible for special education, review evaluation in all areas related to your child's disability and design an individualized educational program (IEP). For students with visual impairments, there are additional areas of essential educational programming for the committee to consider, known as the Expanded Core Curriculum (see #4 below).

Following are some guidelines for ways to analyze VI specific parts of your child's IEP.

1. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT THE IMPACT OF THE VISUAL IMPAIRMENT.

___ Is there a functional vision evaluation (FVE) that clearly and accurately describes her visual functioning?

___ Are there recommendations for modifications related to the visual impairment to be implemented in the classroom?

___ Are there plans for material preparation if your child needs adapted materials?

For students who are deafblind, there are additional considerations due to the additional sensory loss. The Texas Deafblind Project has developed a DB IEP Quality Indicators checklist for your use. This document, accessible at <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/deafblind/indicators.htm> is a very useful organizing tool to help you evaluate your child's program.

2. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT THE ROLE OF A CERTIFIED TEACHER OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS (TVI).

_____ What type of service is being provided by a TVI?

TVIs provide effective services both directly to students and indirectly by consulting with the other team members, ensuring that adapted materials are available, and meeting with families and related agency personnel. If you have questions about the terms direct versus consult services, a good article to review might be "Related Services: Direct versus Consult" from *SEE/HEAR* <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/spring98/>. The role of the VI teacher will change as your child gets older, learns new skills or is served in different settings. An important goal is to teach self-advocacy skills so your child can independently get many vision-related needs (such as adapted materials, preferential seating, or readers) met. Talk with your TVI to find out what specific instruction and services your child needs from this specialized teacher. One aspect

of a quality VI program is definitely good communication between parents and the TVI (and other team members).

_____ How much time is being provided by a TVI?

This should be directly related to your child's assessment and IEP. Many parents think that the more time a TVI spends directly with their child, the better, yet not all children need direct instruction from a TVI and typically not in all subjects. Some skills are typically best taught by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments, such as use of specialized equipment, low vision device training and other visual efficiency skills, use of the abacus or slate and stylus, braille reading skills and some daily living skills. These can then be reinforced and practiced with others.

3. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT THE ROLE OF A CERTIFIED ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SPECIALIST (COMS).

_____ Is there an O&M evaluation and/or IEP goals?

Children must move and interact with their world to learn. Safe and efficient movement is critical to lifelong learning. If your child's visual condition effects her orientation and movement in her home, school or community, a COMS should be involved in her education. Look for an evaluation of your child's O&M skills and a determination on whether O&M services are needed. The need for O&M instruction varies for each child each year. If your child is entering a new setting or a new developmental level, starting a community job or changing classes, she may have a greater need for O&M than in the past. Orientation and mobility is one of the expanded core curriculum areas (see the next section)

considered critical for the education of children with visual impairments.

4. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT THE EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM.

___ Does your child's IEP include goals related to areas beyond academics? The expanded core curriculum is the heart of specialized VI programming.

A major consideration should be to ensure that your child is being assessed and instructed as appropriate in what is called the Expanded Core Curriculum. These areas of instruction were highlighted as part of the *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* based upon how the presence of a visual impairment can affect a child's ability to learn necessary life skills. More information is available on each of these areas at the TSBVI website <www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/index.htm>. A visual impairment puts children at risk for missing critical competencies that sighted children learn by observation. So, check your child's IEP and see if these areas are being addressed:

1. Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills, Including Communication Modes – includes concept development, vi specific study and organizational skills, braille, calendar systems, tactile graphics and adaptations necessary for accessing all areas of the existing core curriculum, such as literacy instruction (see below)

2. Orientation and Mobility – skills for accurate body image, spatial awareness and safe and efficient movement
3. Social Interaction Skills – interaction and relationship skills that are difficult to acquire without systematic instruction
4. Independent Living Skills – daily living skills to promote independence in personal life
5. Recreation and Leisure Skills – organized exposure and skill development that match interests and abilities with options for fun
6. Career Education – learning about the world of work and skills for meaningful and appropriate personal career goals
7. Technology – skills and the necessary equipment to hook into the information technology explosion and succeed in school, recreational and career areas
8. Visual Efficiency Skills – systematic instruction to maximize use of functional vision, low vision devices or low vision technology

As a parent, you will want to ask the teacher of visual impairments (TVI) and certified O&M specialist (COMS) to review assessment in each area with you as a basis for developing priorities for your child. Not every child will need instruction in every area, but the only way to find the gaps is through systematic assessment. Informal checklists and assessment tools as well as academic records and progress notes should be collected from many members of the team and shared. This allows the team to compile a

comprehensive review of your child's current functioning. Remember that you are part of the team, and your information about how well your child uses skills in daily living, recreation and leisure, and social skills in the home setting is crucial. Your knowledge of your child's level of functioning in these areas and others is necessary for the school to have an accurate overview.

Although your child is eligible for schooling from birth through age 22, most skills are best learned in small stages throughout educational years. Go over the Expanded Core Curriculum with your VI staff and ask when specific skills in each area will be addressed.

5. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT VI SPECIFIC INPUT INTO LITERACY INSTRUCTION.

___ Is there a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) that clearly defines how your child will access written materials (as well as other materials)?

Literacy is an area of compensatory skill programming. An LMA will be important for decisions on whether your child will read tactually, with braille or tactile symbols, regular print and pictures with low vision devices, or enlarged print. Although developing literacy skills is emphasized in regular education programs, researchers are continuing to investigate how best to support instruction for visually impaired students. Cay Holbrook and Alan Koenig's research (Holbrook and Koenig, "Ensuring High-Quality Instruction for Students in Braille Literacy Programs," *JVIB*, Nov. 2000) found widespread professional agreement that daily direct instruction from a certified VI teacher for one to two hours each day is essential

for a child engaged in beginning braille literacy. These researchers and others have also studied literacy instruction for students with low vision. The amount and type of instruction for *your* child will vary based on your child's visual needs and her age, learning styles, presence of other disabilities, and instructional setting.

___ Is your child making progress in reading?

You need accurate information about your child's reading levels. Some students struggle with reading for reasons that are not related to their visual status, and more time from a TVI may not solve the problem. For others, the visual impairment causes significant access issues and a TVI is the best professional to support your child's literacy instruction. These differences are not always easy to diagnose. Usually reading problems are best addressed by a team that includes the reading instructor or specialist working with the VI teacher to diagnose the source of the challenge and design a successful program.

6. THE IEP SHOULD REFLECT A LONG-TERM VIEW OF EDUCATION.

___ Is there a transition focus to your annual IEP development?

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the goal of special education is to prepare students for employment and independent living. There are so many areas to think about in writing IEPs that it can become overwhelming. Remember that each year builds upon the last, and that there is a team to help you. You might want

to seek out older students and adults who have visual impairment to develop a model for your child's future. Most people haven't come into contact with many blind or visually impaired adults and question what is possible. It is helpful to cultivate dreams for your child's adult (or at least young adult) life and then try to design each school year to lead most effectively towards making those dreams come true. This will help you to decide if the IEP goals are important, reflect your child's abilities and strengths and preferences, and will help her grow up to find a fulfilling life.

WHAT IF MY CHILD DOESN'T HAVE AN IEP WITH VISION SPECIFIC GOALS?

If your child has a visual impairment that qualifies her for special education, the team must ensure that evaluation of current functioning in all areas related to the disability have been reviewed in developing an annual IEP. If your child does not appear to have any IEP goals or recommended modifications for instruction that reflect the presence of a visual impairment, or any role for a TVI related to the visual impairment, ask to see the informal assessment in all areas of the expanded core curriculum. Decisions on the type and amount of VI service delivery should be based upon how your child is doing in all areas related to the disability.

So, how do you know if your child's VI specific program is high quality? Ask questions, look for progress, check that all areas of the expanded core curriculum have been assessed and addressed and that appropriate VI professional support is available. A quality VI program addresses the impact of vision loss on learning, and provides compensatory and

specialized skills training so that your child can become a productive and happy adult.

Note: These guidelines were created in part using information from *A Guide to Quality Programs for Students with Visual Impairments*. The QPVI process has been used by many districts in Texas and across the country to establish overall quality indicators for district programs. You might ask if your district has participated in that program. An individual student is more likely to receive a quality VI program if the overall district program is well supported. More information is available on the TSBVI website at <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/qpvi.htm>>.

Screening Students for O&M Training Needs

By Ruth Ann Marsh, C.O.M.S., T.V.I., Mentor Coordinator,
TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: This article includes the tool developed by the Orientation and Mobility Division of A.E.R. to help determine if a visually impaired student should be referred for an O&M evaluation.

Key Words: programming, O&M, screening, travel, visually impaired

In 2002, at the A.E.R. Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Division annual meeting, a committee was formed to find or create an O&M screening instrument that could be used by both certified O&M specialists and teachers of the visually impaired

to determine if a visually impaired student should be referred for an O&M evaluation. After reviewing many O&M screening and evaluation instruments, the committee determined that vision teachers should not be asked to evaluate travel skills in a school setting to predict how well students would be able to transfer these skills to other settings in home and community environments.

A vision teacher is trained to evaluate a student's functional use of vision as it relates to the academic environment, but the functional use of vision in academic settings cannot adequately predict the efficiency of vision use in other settings, especially when safe travel is the goal. Since teachers of the visually impaired in Texas are required to address the need for an O&M evaluation when performing a functional vision evaluation, it was decided to identify the vision-related academic modifications that could also indicate the presence of similar difficulties with the use of vision in a variety of travel situations. The following document was then created to provide guidance for teachers of the visually impaired who are performing a functional vision evaluation on a school-aged academic student when addressing the need to make an orientation and mobility referral. Parents and professionals can use this screening tool as they consider the need for O&M training for their students. Similar guidelines for early childhood and/or multiply impaired vision students are in the process of being formulated.

The information on the screening document, as provided below, includes background information, directions, and screening items. The form in its original one page, front

and back format can be found on the TSBVI Website at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

CONTENT OF THE SCREENING INSTRUMENT

To: Teachers of students with visual impairments

Re: Guidelines for requesting an orientation and mobility evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist

In IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997) Orientation and Mobility is included as a related service and described as:

- (i) ...services provided to blind or visually impaired students by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community; and
 - (ii) Includes teaching students the following as appropriate:
 - (A) Spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses (such as sound, temperature and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using sound at a traffic light to cross the street);
 - (B) To use the long cane to supplement visual travel skills or as a tool for safely negotiating the environment for students with no available travel vision;
 - (C) To understand and use remaining vision and distance low vision aids, and
 - (D) Other concepts, techniques, and tools.
- [Sec.300.24 (b) (6)]

In Texas, a functional vision evaluation (FVE) can be performed by either a 'professional certified in the education of students with visual impairments or a certified orientation and mobility instructor' and must include 'recommendations concerning the need for a clinical low vision evaluation and an orientation and mobility evaluation.' [SBOE Rules 89.1040 (c)(12)(A)(ii)(1)]

When determining the need for an orientation and mobility evaluation, it is advisable to have some form of documentation to support the decision. An orientation and mobility specialist has access to many O&M screening and evaluation documents, but these usually refer to student activities not frequently observed by a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI). Additionally, IDEA clearly states that students with visual impairments attain 'systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home and community.' This necessitates that any assessment used to determine the need for orientation and mobility instruction address the visually impaired child's ability to travel safely and effectively in all three named environments.

One way to assure that the need for instruction in travel skills is adequately addressed is to have a certified orientation and mobility specialist participate in the functional vision evaluation, especially in the required portion wherein the need for an orientation and mobility evaluation is addressed. Or all visually impaired children can automatically be referred for an orientation and

mobility evaluation by a certified O&M specialist. However, when it is necessary for a teacher of students with visual impairments to make this determination without the assistance of a certified O&M specialist, the TVI can examine the listed modifications required for the student. Many of the modifications needed in order for students to benefit from public education also indicate the need for special training to develop the ability to travel safely, successfully and efficiently in home, school and community environments.

On the reverse of this document are listed modifications/adaptations for classroom instruction that also would indicate the need for special instruction in safe, successful and efficient travel in a variety of environments. If any of these modifications are required for classroom instruction, the child should be referred for an evaluation of travel skills by a certified orientation and mobility specialist.

Editor's Note: Below is the material mentioned as being on the reverse side of the document.

GUIDELINES FOR REQUESTING AN ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY EVALUATION

Instructions: When determining the need for an orientation and mobility evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist, the need for any of the following modifications for classroom instruction could also impact the student's ability to travel safely, efficiently and successfully in the school, home and/or community

environments. Therefore, referral for an O&M evaluation should be made.

Modifications for Near Acuity

Headache or fatigue due to eye strain

Use of magnifiers, CCTV, Zoom Text

Use of Braille

Tape recordings of required readings

Use of large print or talking calculator

Use of talking watch

Additional time to complete assignments

Reduced assignments

Use of peer reader or note taker

Reading materials in large print

Modifications for Distance Acuity

Enlarged writing on blackboard

Large high contrast writing on dry erase board

May go directly to chalkboard to see written material

Seating near instructional area

Handout versions of board work or overheads

Increased time to copy from the board

Inability to read facial expressions

Inability to recognize individuals across a classroom

Use of monocular or handheld telescope

Verbal descriptions of pictures, movies, videos, etc.

Additional time for transitions to classes

Modifications for Restricted Field of Vision

Preferential seating to adjust for field loss

Eccentric viewing due to scotomas or field loss

Adaptations in Physical Education due to field loss

Modifications for Environmental Impact

Use of contrasting colors for visual discrimination
Use of black marker on dry erase boards
Use of paper with heavy black lines
Preferential seating due to glare
Wearing of hat or sunglasses due to glare
Use of highlighters for emphasis
Use of color transparencies
Additional time to adjust to changes in lighting
Assignment of an aide to assist/monitor the student

Modifications for Visual Tracking Difficulties

Increased time to copy board work due to oscillation or nystagmus
Adaptations in Physical Education class due to inability to see thrown balls
Headaches caused by eye fatigue

Additionally, if a student with a visual impairment needs instruction in any of the following disability specific core curricula area, an evaluation to determine the need for instruction in travel skills in school, home and community environments should be conducted by an orientation and mobility specialist.

- Career Readiness
- Daily Living Skills
- Listening and Study Skills
- Social and Interpersonal Skills
- Assistive Technology

- Visual Efficiency
- Recreation and Leisure

Whenever the following events occur for a visually impaired student, a COMS should automatically be directed by the ARD committee to perform an orientation and mobility evaluation:

Impending promotion to another grade that necessitates changing schools

- Move into a different school system and/or attendance area
- Expected graduation from public education within two years
- Previous O&M instruction provided to a student transferring into a new district
- Onset or recent identification of a new visual impairment
- Presence of a progressive or unstable visual impairment

Orientation and Mobility Training for Students Who Are Deafblind: Going Beyond the Blue Book

By Melvin Marx, COMS, Houston ISD, Houston, Texas

Abstract: This article provides a sampling of modifications in O&M techniques for use with deafblind students.

Key words: programming, orientation and mobility, O&M, deafblind, modifications, orientation and mobility techniques

Do you have indelible memories of your collegiate experience? As a graduate of Stephen F. Austin State University in the field of rehabilitation, majoring in orientation and mobility, I frequently think back on many positive memories. I fondly remember the orientation and mobility practicum lessons under blindfold in downtown Lufkin, the chaotic noise of twenty five Perkins Brailers hammering out inharmonious melodic lessons in the Braille 301 class, or waking up at 8:10 for Dr. Weber's 8:00 Rehab classes. Do these memories ring a bell? These may be a few of your favorites as well. For me, each memory holds a special place in the journey of what makes me who I am.

I believe that for all orientation and mobility professionals one memory that makes a lasting impression in the field of O&M is the study of the "Blue Book." The "Blue Book" is officially entitled *Orientation and Mobility Techniques: A Guide for the Practitioner*. Written by Purvis Ponder and the late Dr. Everett "Butch" Hill, the "Blue Book" is chock-full of precise technological application on every pre-cane and cane technique known to the O&M field. This book is a point of reference for every O&M who has reached out to teach and empower the life of a visually impaired or blind student. If the O&M profession had a bible, the "Blue Book" would be it.

Full of confidence and success in my "Blue Book" knowledge and teaching strategies, I continued along teaching fellow coworkers and students in the utilization of proper O&M techniques. I continued on my daily crusade of

furthering my students' independence until one day when I received a phone call from my supervisor. She instructed me to go and evaluate a new student who was entering our program. This particular student was totally blind and profoundly deaf and yet cognitively on target with his age. As I began working with this student, I quickly came to a shocking reality. My method for teaching the "Blue Book" techniques to this student was functionally impossible.

Needless to say I did continue working with this student and eventually had many success stories in relation to developing his understanding of O&M concepts and the purpose for their use. I have also discovered that, as the years have gone by, I have evaluated and picked up more of these students for O&M service. Tragically, however, I have come to find out that this population of students is highly underserved. Probably the largest reason has to do with the lack of preparation and schooling in this specific population. When it comes to teaching students with dual sensory impairments of vision and hearing, we in the O&M field must be willing to step out of the box of standardized teaching. Modification of what we have learned from the "Blue Book" must become our mantra.

The information that follows is a sampling of a few modifications to the O&M "Blue Book" techniques. I hope you find this material helpful as you assist your deafblind students in achieving the highest level of independence that they deserve to reach.

- In teaching sighted guide the traditional method can be taught having the student holding on to the guide's arm

just above their elbow. For younger students the grip will have to be modified to holding the guide's index finger or wrist depending on height and strength needs.

- For more receptive communication to assist the student's knowledge of what is coming up in his/her environment, move the student's sighted guide position to a hand under hand guidance. This method will allow the guide to wrap his/her thumb on top of the student's hand for more proprioceptive feedback. The examples listed below should be given to the student right before the requested movement takes place:
 - Left turns: hand movement goes twice towards the left.
 - Right turns: hand movement goes twice towards the right.
 - Ramps: Angle hand 45 degrees in a descending or ascending direction depending on how you are traveling on the ramp. Give an upward or downward hand motion, in the 45-degree position, twice to indicate the direction of the ramp.
 - Straight ahead: a forward surge of the hand given in intervals depending on the length of the straight travel.
 - Stop: hand moves from a 0 degree position to a 90 degree position. Pause in the stopped position to relate the requested action to the student.
 - Advanced directionality: This is for students who are emerging in their understanding of sign language. The directions left and right can be signed with an

- “L” or “R” in the student’s hand to communicate which direction they are being requested to take.
- Up: hand movement goes twice in an upward elevation.
 - Down: hand movement goes twice in a downward elevation.
 - If some students need more proprioceptive feedback to grasp the concepts of up and down, have the hand under hand guidance also establish contact at the guide’s waist. This will give additional communication to the student to the length of the step up or drop off.
 - Touch cues have additional communication benefits for students who are utilizing adaptive mobility devices or for those who are engaged in trailing activities. These examples should be given to assist the student in understanding movement they are being requested to initiate.
 - Left turn: Using your index and middle fingers, make a sweeping motion down the student’s left upper arm.
 - Right turn: Using your index and middle fingers, make a sweeping motion down the student’s right upper arm.
 - Straight: While standing behind the student, make a sweeping motion across the student’s shoulder with the side of your hand. Your pinky finger should be the only finger of contact on the student.
 - Stop: Place your hand firmly on the student’s upper shoulder.

- Squaring off: You will need to have good rapport with your student for this modification. The reason for this is because you will be physically maneuvering his/her body into a correct positioning initially. After using the stop touch cue, drag your index and middle fingers down the middle of the student's back to indicate squaring off. Position the student so that their shoulders and feet are touching the wall in the correct squaring off position. Then give the student a positive "good job" touch cue by patting them on the shoulder.

For all of these modifications the key is repetition. Remember, Rome was not built in a day. Your students will need these modifications routinely in order to gain understanding of their purpose and meaning. May these initial modifications assist you in teaching your children to develop to the fullness of their O&M potential.

Editor's Note: Melvin Marx graduated from SFASU in 1991. He has worked both in the rehabilitation and educational fields. He has received specialized training in the area of deaf-blindness from The Helen Keller National Center in Sandspoint, New York. For the past twelve years Melvin has been employed by Houston ISD. His specialty areas of training include the multiply impaired and deafblind populations. You may contact Melvin by email: mmarx@houstonisd.org

The Early Braille Readers Project

Holly Cooper, Ph.D., Outreach Technology Consultant,
TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: The Early Braille Readers Project, a grant-funded two-year project begun in the 2003-2004 school year, provides specific braille technology and training for vision teachers and classroom teachers of braille-reading students ages 5-7. Infusing the classroom environment with braille and including the braille-reading student more fully in educational activities with print-reading peers is encouraged.

Keywords: braille literacy, inclusion, Mountbatten braille writer

At the beginning of this fiscal year our grant, The Early Braille Readers Project, finally was funded after a wait of almost a year. Many of our readers may be familiar with this project, as we published an announcement in the Winter 2003 See/Hear newsletter. We received funding to purchase some high tech braille writing devices, and to support the use of these devices through face-to-face and distance instruction. But the grant is not about making technology available to students, it's about giving braille reading students more opportunities to read braille, giving them more opportunities to be included in classroom activities with their print reading peers, and making braille writing easier for the students and teachers.

This two year grant funded a total of 20 different students in kindergarten and first grade classes across Texas. Ten began in the 2003-2004 academic year, and ten more will be added for the 2004-2005 academic year. To make the

greatest impact on the students' education, we wrote the grant for students who were 5 to 8 years old, primarily braille readers, and at or near grade level for their age compared to their print reading peers. According to the state census of students in this age group, we estimate we will provide services to almost two-thirds of the braille reading students in those grades in Texas! That's a big impact on a very small population.

To participate in this project, regional Education Service Centers were contacted and given the opportunity to apply for partnership with the Early Braille Readers Project. Students in partner regions were then eligible to apply. Since we got off to a late start with our funds not being dispersed until after the school year started, we scrambled to contact partner Service Center consultants for students with visual impairments to help us locate students and their teachers who were in the correct age and ability range. By late October, we were able to fill a workshop with teachers interested in training on the technology.

As vision teachers, we are aware of the vast differences in access to reading materials between print and braille users. Sighted children grow up in a world in which they are able to use vision to gain information from both near and distant sources. They see print everywhere in the world around them. Early in childhood potential print readers begin to recognize and attach meaning to signs, symbols, and letters, as any parent of a toddler who sees a sign for their favorite fast food restaurant will testify. Strong correlations have been established between environments rich in print and children's early success in learning to read. Preschool and kindergarten

teachers routinely label items around the room, post signs and schedules, provide books and consumable print materials, and do art and learning activities which use letters and words. Our students who are blind miss out on many of these rich opportunities. Parents and early childhood service providers struggle to find and make books in braille, but this is just a small part of the literacy experience of young children.

There have been great strides in technology for braille users in the last decade. Unfortunately, most braille reading students in the primary grades do not have access to much of this technology. Our grant selected one device, which we believed would be versatile and easy to use both by the student and by the teacher. This device was the Mountbatten Pro braille writer, which has features allowing it to: be used as an electronic braille writer; connect to a computer keyboard and will output braille; connect to a visual display device and show in print what is written in braille; connect to a printer and output in print; and connect to a computer, and with braille translation software, be used as a braille embosser. The Mountbatten also has voice output capabilities and speaks the letters or words as the user writes. Because of the ease of use this device provides in going from print to braille and braille to print, we believed it would be an ideal device to enrich the literacy environment of braille reading children. We also believed it would facilitate interaction between the print reading general education teacher and the braille reading student, and between the braille reading student and the class peers.

In October, we began to meet our participants, and shortly thereafter we began to go on site visits to deliver the

equipment, set it up, and teach the vision teacher and classroom teacher to use it. It was February by the time all sites were set up. We had three students in Region 4 (Houston and surrounding counties), two students in Region 6 (Huntsville and surrounding counties), one student in Region 12 (Waco and surrounding counties), three students in Region 13 (Austin and surrounding counties), and one student in Region 19 (El Paso and surrounding counties).

We spent some exhausting months setting up and training vision teachers to use the Mountbatten and its peripherals. We also worked hard to impress upon all staff members involved in each student's education that this device was easy to use and could be used to provide a much greater quantity of braille reading opportunities to the student. We encouraged the use of the Mountbatten for creating braille "on the fly" easily and informally. Classroom teachers were very interested in the technology and the ability to create braille. We soon heard stories of classroom teachers making lists of spelling words, writing the "question of the day" in braille, or introducing a topic for the student's journal page in braille. Classroom teachers were generally eager to use the Mountbatten and to make materials for the braille reading student. Vision teachers loved the ease of use and the ability to download materials translated by Duxbury using the computer into the Mountbatten and output them in braille in the classroom. Close collaboration between the vision teachers and the classroom teachers was now possible, as they became partners in educating the braille reading student.

As part of the application process to participate in the Early Braille Readers Project, we tried to impress on the vision

teachers and classroom teachers that being part of this project would require extra work and time on their part. Teaching a kindergarten or first grader to read and write braille requires a lot of time and energy ordinarily, but adding a new device to the mix could potentially make it more complicated. Although the Mountbatten took some additional effort for the vision teacher to learn, it also saved time by making braille easier to produce and making it easier for the classroom teacher to share some of the responsibility. In no way was this device seen by either teacher as a replacement for the vision teacher's role as instructor of the student with a visual impairment in reading and writing braille. In addition, there was careful proofreading and checking of braille content by the vision teacher. During the course of the year, we were often impressed with the dedication and skill and energy and creativity of the teachers who participated in the Early Braille Readers Project.

Results of surveys and other feedback from teachers indicated overall satisfaction with using the Mountbatten to teach braille writing, and to support braille reading. Several specific advantages were mentioned:

- The braille keys were easy to depress, less finger and hand strength was required than was needed for a Perkins braille writer.
- Many teachers cited the voice output feature of the Mountbatten as a significant support for their students developing phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence.
- Many teachers believe the use of the Mountbatten was highly motivating for their students because the students enjoyed the features of the Mountbatten.

- Classroom teachers had increased awareness of braille as a result of the features of the Mountbatten. The ease of use inputting print on a standard computer keyboard and outputting braille, and the ability to see in print on the Mimic what the student was writing in braille, made braille more accessible for these teachers.
- Classroom peers found the Mountbatten interesting, and were eager to participate in games and other activities with the braille reading student.
- The braille reading student had access to more braille and to more spontaneously generated braille because of the ease with which the classroom teacher and students could generate braille.

Some other features that vision teachers listed or stated were helpful for their braille reading students were the following:

- It was easy for the student to correct mistakes using the Mountbatten.
- The Mountbatten helped the student become more aware of spacing between words because of the auditory feedback.
- Some students “discovered” braille contractions before they were taught because they made random braille characters or mistakes when writing.

Next year we will add some new regions to our project. New regions which have joined are: Region 1, the lower Rio Grande Valley; Region 2, Corpus Christi and surrounding counties; Region 10, Dallas and surrounding counties; Region

14, Abilene and surrounding counties; and Region 16, Amarillo and surrounding counties. We are looking forward to adding 10 new students to the Early Braille Readers Project for next year, and getting to watch as new students discover braille and the joy of reading and writing. Please contact the specialist for students with visual impairments at your Education Service Center if you know of an eligible child for this exciting project.

RESOURCES

For more information about the Mountbatten Braille Writer, see the resources listed below.

Quantum Technologies, maker of the Mountbatten Pro Braille Writer

<http://www.quantech.com.au/products/quantum_products/braille/mountbatten.htm>

Tutorials and guides for using the Mountbatten

<<http://www.quantech.com.au/support/index.htm>>

SET BC (Special Education Technology British Columbia)
Vision teacher Graham Cook's Visual Guide and Teaching Guide and Lesson Plans.

<<http://www.setbc.org/res/mbpro/default.html>>

SET BC

Emerging Braille Literacy Project: a report on a project similar to ours which was conducted by SET BC

<http://www.setbc.org/projects/braille_lit/monty.html>

Summer of Sights: Summer Enrichment Program For Students with Visual Impairments

By Keri Harvey, M.Ed., COMS; Kathy Tomlin, M.Ed., CTVI;
And Mary Ann Foster, CTVI,
Grayson County Special Education Co-op

Abstract: The Grayson County Special Education Co-op sponsors an annual two-week summer enrichment program to teach compensatory skills to academic students with visual impairments.

Key Words: Programming, summer, special program, Co-op, academic, visually impaired

Summer of Sights is a two-week summer enrichment program for students with visual impairments in grades 1-11. It is specifically designed for the academic visually impaired students who are served by the Grayson County Special Education Co-op. The Co-op serves 11 small school districts throughout Grayson County. These academic visually impaired students are usually the only visually impaired student in their schools, giving them very little opportunity to meet and socialize with other visually impaired students. The CTVI (Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired) and COMS (Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist) observed that Life Skills students are provided many opportunities throughout the regular school year to address compensatory skills. However, the academic visually impaired students do not always experience these same opportunities. So the Summer of Sights was developed with one of its purposes being the opportunity for these students to meet and socialize with other visually impaired students.

The CTVI and COMS begin each summer's planning by brainstorming about the focus for the summer program. Last year, 2003, the focus of the program was daily living skills and social skills. This year, 2004, the focus of the program is recreation/leisure activities and social skills. After deciding on the focus of the summer activities, the CTVI and COMS prepared a proposal for the director of the Special Education Co-op to review. The proposal included the focus, activities, personnel needs, transportation needs, and budget. The proposal was presented, reviewed, and accepted.

FUNDING

The funding for Summer of Sights is shared between the Grayson County Special Education Co-op and money raised by the VI teachers. For example, the VI money for the 2003 summer program was provided by Mary Ann Foster, one of the VI teachers. She was awarded Teacher of the Year for Cook County and received \$1,000 which was shared with the summer program. The second year of the program, \$2,000 was provided by the Texoma Regatta fund-raiser, which provides funds for many special needs groups in Grayson County. Examples of how the funding is divided between the Co-op and the VI programs include:

Co-op funding

- Salary for one COMS
- Salary for one bus driver/aide
- Transportation (a special education school bus)

VI funding

- Food
- Drinks

- Paper products for lunches and snacks
- T-shirts and transparency supplies
- Capers for Kids
- Amtrak
- Dining out
- Memory book supplies
- Mall money

THE SUMMER OF SIGHTS PROGRAM

Each day begins for the students with the school bus picking them up at their homes. This is a 1.5 to 2 hour process because the students live all over Grayson County. The CTVI and COMS meet the bus at a centrally located school which has been chosen to house the summer program. It is important to have access to an oven and a gym for the “camp” activities. After the bus ride, the camper’s day begins at 9 am and ends at 3 pm. The first year, 2003, the Homemaking classroom was used as the home base. The second year, 2004, the PPCD room is the camp classroom.

The following schedule is from the 2003 year of SOS. This is very typical of the activities that the COMS and CTVI found to be appropriate for the goal of this camp, daily living skills and social skills. It is important to remember that each community offers different opportunities of enrichment.

Schedule for Week 1

Day 1: The CTVI and COMS developed the menu for the week. The students were involved in the menu planning process. For example, they helped decide how much food would be needed for the two weeks of camp. Next they had to

decide what kitchen equipment would be needed to cook the food they had chosen. After making the grocery list, everyone went out to lunch at a Mexican food restaurant in Gainesville. After lunch, the campers and teachers went to Super Wal-Mart to buy the items on their grocery list. Once at the store, the students were divided into several groups and the list was divided among the students. The students shopped for the food, checked out at the store, and returned to the school. The students then put the food away in the cabinets, refrigerator, and pantry.

Day 2: Brownies were the order of the day—the students prepared brownies. The recipe on the brownie box was enlarged so the low vision students could follow the directions on the box. A Braille copy of the recipe was provided to the Braille reader. As the students prepared their brownies, Kitra Gray, Christy Householder and Randy Foederer from the Region 10 ESC set up the goal-ball court in the gym for the students. This support staff from Region 10 was crucial in teaching the students the rules of goal-ball. The students also had scooter board races in the gym after many goal ball activities. After goal ball and scooter board races in the gym, the students, teachers, and support staff from Region 10 returned to the classroom where the students prepared homemade pizzas and salad.

Day 3: The students did motor activities in the gym to begin this day 3. These motor skills included

goal-ball, scooter boards and basketball. Part of the social skill activities included playing adapted board games and card games. UNO in Braille and Braille playing cards were used to play several games. As the younger students played the card and board games, the older students prepared lunch. Lunch today include quesadillas, queso, and fruit. After lunch we all went swimming in a local community swimming pool. Prior arrangements had been made with the director of the swimming pool for the camp to have the exclusive use of the pool. The community volunteered the use of two lifeguards the entire time the campers swam.

Day 4: The campers traveled to Dallas to Capers for Kids. This is a participant oriented drama program. Our campers were met by the director of Capers for Kids. It did not take long for her to have our campers in the process of showing different emotions. After we learned several emotions and how to “act,” our campers donned elaborate costumes. With care and direction the campers performed a short skit that was designed to enhance the self-esteem of the students. Several of the students commented that acting in a skit at Capers for Kids was their favorite activity at SOS. We loaded back into the bus for our short ride to the Olive Garden Restaurant, by the way, where our campers were readily provided with a Braille menu.

Day 5: This day was an evaluation and planning day for the COMS and the CTVI. This provides an

opportunity to put the first week's pictures into scrapbook form. Then plans were made for the next week of camp. The students did not attend camp this day.

Schedule for Week 2

- Day 6: The group ventured to Stonebriar Mall in Frisco. The younger students went to Build a Bear where they were helped in the design, creation and naming of their own personal bear. As the younger students built their bear, the older students conducted an orienteering activity in the Mall. All students then were given \$10 to buy their own lunches in the Food Court at the mall.
- Day 7: Therapeutic horseback riding was on the agenda for today. This was also very good self-esteem building activity for the campers. When the camper would climb into the saddle on the horse, the student's face would just beam with joy. After everyone had a turn riding a horse, the group made their way to Chuck E. Cheeses for lunch. The COMS had saved up coupons for free tokens and \$10 pizzas.
- Day 8: The day began with motor activities in the gym. Afterwards, the students played adapted board games and card games. For lunch today the menu included sandwiches, dirt cups and kool-aid. After cleaning up the kitchen from lunch and a brief rest period, all the campers went swimming, again, at the community swimming pool.

Day 9: All Aboard!!!!!! Today began by making our sack lunches to carry with us as we prepared for a train ride to Fort Worth. At this time the older students also prepared cookie dough for the family picnic day planned for day 10. When lunches were packed and the cookie dough was prepared, we loaded on a school bus to travel from camp to Gainesville. In Gainesville we boarded the Amtrak for the exciting train ride to Fort Worth. Upon arrival in Fort Worth the school bus picked us up at the train station and carried the campers to The Light House for the Blind for a personal tour with our guide, Wayne Pound. The school bus carried all the campers and teachers back to the school. Due to the activities and the train's schedule, our day was a little longer than usual.

Day 10: Family picnic day for the campers of Summer of Sights. The students spent almost all morning preparing for the family picnic. They prepared brownies, cookies, hamburger patties, tea and kool-aid. The school bus transported the students to the park where the campers were able to play on the playground equipment in the City Park. Hamburgers and hot dogs were prepared on a barbeque grill for all of the campers and their family. By noon all families were there along with grand parents, brothers and sisters, and even some family pets. Everyone enjoyed the cook out and visiting with the teachers and other campers.

SUMMARY

Summer of Sights is an enrichment camp for students with visual impairment. It is intended to address the Expanded Core Curriculum skills. The students were sent home from camp with a two month calendar which listed a specific activity to complete each day. It was great to watch these students bond with other students with visual impairments. They do not always have an opportunity to do any type of bonding with other visually impaired students during the school year because they are often the only VI student in their school community. Every camper's parent or guardian commented about how excited their child was each day when they came home from camp.

Forms and printed materials used for Summer of Sights have been posted at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

Our Commitment to Children With Multiple Disabilities

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

Abstract: Dr. Hatlen discusses the historic role of Teachers of the Visually Impaired in serving students with additional disabilities, and the ongoing commitment to valuing and teaching all students who are blind or visually impaired.

Key Words: News & Views, multiple disabilities, TVIs, MIVI

I think I may have developed an addiction to email, and the result is that I subscribe to just too many listserves. One of

these listserves recently became involved in a very sensitive topic. A contributor suggested that teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) do not provide the same level or quality of services to blind and visually impaired students with additional disabilities as to other children. The writer suggested that my profession tends to better serve academically capable visually impaired students first, and often attempts to avoid serving more challenging students with multiple disabilities.

I know that the writer is wrong, so I attempted to provide a very brief, incomplete history of services to children with multiple disabilities in response. Below is what I wrote. I would appreciate any reactions, questions, or responses to this short statement.

The history of our profession and its role in serving children with multiple disabilities is rich with commitment, dedication, and success. As with visually impaired students with no additional disabilities, there are the occasional “horror stories” from both parents and educators about when the “system” didn’t work. However, these sometimes tragic stories in no way reflect the professional commitment of the vast majority of educators of visually impaired students to those with additional disabilities.

I must often remind myself that the first 35 years of my career were in California, and, while I thought I had a good handle on what was happening with blind and visually impaired students in my home state, this did not necessarily reflect the status of educational services nationwide. Thus, what follows is my perception of a very brief history of services to visually impaired children with additional

disabilities in California. If it can be generalized, fine—if not, then at least you know something about my home state.

In the mid-1950s, children blinded from retrolental fibroplasia (RLF, now known as Retinopathy of Prematurity) were reaching school age. No one was ready for that population—schools for the blind had not expanded their facilities, personnel preparation was limited to a handful of universities, and local school programs were few in number. For reasons I know, but will not elaborate here, most of the families of RLF children became champions for local school education, and worked hard to make it a reality. Thus, the migration of blind children with no additional disabilities from schools for the blind to local schools began.

Until this time, most schools for the blind were strong academic schools, highly selective in whom they admitted. Few children with additional disabilities attended schools for the blind prior to the late 1950s. I recall that the California School for the Blind had about 190 students in 1958. Mildred Huffman (author of “Fun Comes First for the Blind Slow-Learner”) taught one class with about 10-12 students who were considered at that time as mildly mentally retarded.

About a half-mile away from the California School for the Blind in Berkeley, I began as a resource teacher in a regular elementary school in 1956-57. There were 15 blind children and one “partially sighted” child enrolled at Emerson Elementary School. They were “successfully” included in regular classrooms, and I pulled them out for limited amounts of time to work on braille and typing. In those days, as local school programs developed rapidly all over California, there

was a process used for determining which children were to receive education in the public school system. The term “educationally non-feasible” was used by psychologists and administrators to deny certain students the benefit of a “free and appropriate education.”

Since it was considered very critical that early efforts to include blind students in regular classrooms be successful, many, perhaps most, of the RLF children were labeled “educationally non-feasible” and denied education at both the local school and the school for the blind. At one time, around 1959, in Alameda County (where Berkeley resides), I knew of 26 blind children who had been denied admission to the Berkeley resource program. More children were turned down than accepted. And these were the children who seemed to have additional disabilities. My colleagues and I thought that many of them were functioning at a level below chronological age because of experiential deprivation, but we found it almost impossible to convince our administrators that at least some of these children with multiple impairments deserved an education.

Finally, in 1960, three blind children with multiple disabilities were admitted to Emerson School in Berkeley. Because I’m not very imaginative, I placed these children in regular classrooms—that’s what I did with all the academically capable students I served. Well, these three children could not be served effectively in regular classrooms, and I had to resort to initiating a partially self-contained classroom. I want to emphasize, however, that my commitment to those three children was as strong and passionate as with the other students I served. I was not alone—colleagues from

throughout California began serving students with additional disabilities. They did it willingly and with dedication and professionalism. And we did it long before PL 94-142.

Meanwhile, the California School for the Blind (CSB) was having difficulty with its enrollment. As parents opted for local school placement, the number of students served by CSB began to decline. I became Principal of CSB in 1962, and the need to change the services and philosophy of the school was very apparent. When I arrived at CSB in 1962, there were about 20 children with multiple disabilities. When I left in 1966, the school had become ungraded, and by far the majority of children were multiply disabled. I believe that this rapid transition happened throughout the country, and that it wasn't always an easy evolution. There are schools for the blind that resisted this new role until they began to be concerned about their very existence.

Today schools for the blind stand tall as providers of high quality education for blind and visually impaired children with additional disabilities. Some schools specialize in this population—for example, St. Joseph's School in New Jersey, and the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind in Pittsburgh. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a better educational program for these students than that offered by these two schools. I could easily add the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to this list, and this is generally true of all schools for the blind, where the majority of children served have multiple disabilities.

In 1963, AFB published a classic small book entitled *No Place to Go* by Kathern Gruber and Polly Moor. It described

the desperate situation for many blind children who were being declared “educationally non-feasible.” This book was followed by *No Time to Lose* in 1968, edited by Polly Moor. Read the last paragraph in this book, and know that we accepted this challenge:

“...Helping each child to reach his optimal development is not only the crux of teaching but the joy of teaching. The benefits are shared by the child and his parents, the teacher and school, and by the widening community in which the child will live. Time is important. For the child there is no time to lose. Teaching the blind child who is multiply impaired demands conviction, love, patience, and a creative, daring spirit.”

Recognition of the responsibility, the joy, and the challenge to serve blind and visually impaired students with additional disabilities grew rapidly through the 1970s and 1980s. We learned quickly that many students being served in other areas of special education also had a significant visual impairment, and TVIs collaborated with other teachers and other disciplines so that all areas of need for the child were met. Personnel preparation programs took initiative in adding course work for future teachers that better prepared them for a wide diversity of blind and visually impaired students.

For many years I was involved in teacher preparation in Northern California. I know what students learned about teaching a wide diversity of blind and visually impaired students. I know that they learned to love, honor, and respect all children, regardless of various levels of additional disabilities. I never heard a teacher suggest that she did not have responsibility for these children. I never knew of a

teacher who placed children on a hierarchy, with those with complex additional disabilities on the bottom.

Today, many local school programs of which I am aware have tremendous programs for blind and visually impaired students with additional disabilities. I have yet to meet a TVI who has suggested that she/he is not professionally and morally responsible for the education of all children, including those with multiple disabilities. Multi-disciplinary teams of highly trained experts work to provide these children with the very best education we know how to provide.

Every child is precious. We do not value one child over another. Every child deserves the very best we have to offer, and I know that we are committed to providing the best.

Assessment CD-rom Now Available in Spanish

Abstract: "Child-guided Strategies for Assessing Children Who Are Deafblind or Have Multiple Disabilities," developed by Dr. Jan van Dijk and Catherine Nelson, is now available in Spanish.

Key Words: News & Views, van Dijk, Spanish, training, assessment

Traditional assessment methods are often very stressful to young children who are deafblind or have severe multiple disabilities. The information that is gained from such assessments may be unreliable and inaccurate as they fail to take into account the impact that disabilities including

sensory impairments, motor disabilities, communication deficits, and health concerns have on each of the interrelated developmental areas.

Based upon many years of assessing children who are deafblind, Dr. Jan van Dijk and Catherine Nelson designed an interactive CD-rom that guides users through an assessment process that provides information that is useful to educational planning and creates opportunities for children to demonstrate their best potential in a comfortable, secure format. The children guide the process as the assessor meets them at their level and discovers how they learn and can best be taught.

The Assessment CD-rom is now available in a Spanish, Windows version for \$40. (The accompanying 28 page booklet has not been translated from English.) The English version of this CD-rom can be purchased for \$45, in either a Windows or Mac format.

The CD-rom “Living with CHARGE: Assessment, Prevention and Intervention of Challenging Behavior,” developed by Dr. van Dijk and Dr. Arno de Kort, is also available. It contains up-to-date information about the syndrome. Using an interactive format, four children are discussed in depth, their behavior is analyzed and suggestions for intervention are discussed or demonstrated. The CD-Rom will help family members, doctors, teachers and other service providers become more aware of the enormous impact CHARGE has on the unique behavioral and learning challenges of children with this syndrome.

To purchase any these resources, send a check or money order payable to:

Mr. Joe Franken
4619 Spyglass Drive
Dallas, Texas 75287

Indicate "Assessment Spanish," "Assessment Windows," "Assessment Mac" or "CHARGE" on the check or money order.

IDEA Reauthorization Update

By Beth Dennis, Children's/Transition Consultant, DARS Blind Services Division

Abstract: This article provides a summary of the bills passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate to reauthorize IDEA.

Key Words: Individuals with Disabilities Act, IDEA, IDEA reauthorization, special education, legislation, News & Views

BILL REAUTHORIZATION HISTORY (TAKEN FROM WRIGHTSLAW.COM)

On April 30, 2003, the House of Representatives voted 251-171 to approve HR 1350, the Republican bill to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The New York Times reported, 'The bill is intended to reduce the number of students deemed learning disabled by helping struggling children earlier. It is also intended to cut down on the paperwork involved in special education, and reduce the legal expenses of states that face lawsuits from parents seeking

extra help for disabled children.” However, many consumer groups have opposed the bill because it proposes “optional” 3-year IEPs, eliminates IEP objectives and benchmarks, weakens procedural safeguards and protections for parents and kids, and allows schools to suspend or expel students who have behavior problems for violating school “codes of conduct even if the misbehavior is related to their disabilities.”

On May 13, the Senate passed S. 1248, the Senate version of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), on a 95-3 vote. According to Wrightslaw, “this bill is significantly different from the bill passed by the House of Representatives last year. A joint House-Senate conference committee will meet in an effort to resolve these differences. After the House and Senate agree on a compromise bill, they will vote on the final version of the bill. Although we cannot predict what Congress will do, it seems unlikely that the House and Senate will resolve their differences this year (an election year). If the conference committee does not develop a compromise bill that is acceptable to the Senate and House this year, IDEA will be reintroduced next year.”

BILL PROVISIONS

The AFB website noted that HR 1350 includes provisions that would facilitate access to printed educational material. These provisions accomplish certain key elements contained in the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act (HR 490). While this is a welcome development, this language does not include a central repository, capacity-building grants and state plan requirements that are part of the IMAA legislation. The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard

referred to in the legislation is presumed to be the standard being developed with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (See the Dept. of Education issues press release: “Voluntary National Standard for Accessible Digital Instructional Materials to be Developed”).

The American Council for the Blind website indicated support for several specific provisions in Senate bill 1248, including:

- Sec. 602(25) which ensures that “orientation and mobility” and “travel training” instruction are recognized as distinct disciplines in the IDEA definition of “related services”;
- Sec. 612(a)(2) and Sec. 613(a)(6) which clarify the relationship between state and local education agencies and publishers of instructional materials to ensure that required textbooks and related materials are made available to students with disabilities in a timely manner;
- Sec. 614(d)(3)(B)(iii)(II) which ensures that socialization and independent living skills, orientation and mobility, and skills in the use of assistive technology including low vision devices, are among the instructional services that receive special consideration in the development of IEPs for children who are blind or visually impaired; and
- Sec. 675 which creates both a uniform national standard for electronic textbook files prepared by publishers and a central repository for such files to facilitate efficient access by state and local education agencies, as well as those entities which produce materials in alternate formats such as braille, large

print and audiocassette, for students who are blind or have other print disabilities.

They also note their opposition to the provisions in the IDEA that are going to hurt children and families. These provisions include caps on attorney's fees and paperwork reduction efforts that harm protections for parents and students. They are also calling for mandatory full funding of part B.

The Center for Law and Education, an interdisciplinary research institute established by Harvard University and the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, whose mission is "to protect and advance the legal interests of the poor through research and action on the legal implications of educational policies, particularly those affecting equality of educational opportunity," states on their website that Senate Bill 1248:

- Makes it easier for school personnel to remove students with disabilities from school instead of requiring behavior to be treated as an education issue;
- *Eliminates* the right of students with disabilities *alleged* to have violated school codes (e.g., cutting class, being tardy) to "*stay put*" in their current school placements during the period of an appeal by parents who challenge the basis for removing their child for more than 10 school days; or a school's determination that the student's action was unrelated to his/her disability; or that the school was not providing the student needed supports and services;
- *Removes* parents' decision-making role in programming and placement determinations affecting teaching and learning;

- *Eliminates* required benchmarks or short-term objectives from a student’s IEP —components described by the House-Senate Committee Report in 1997 as “crucial” for improved and effective teaching and instruction;
- Allows 3 year IEPs instead of requiring annual IEPs for students in their last years of entitlement;
- Permits teachers of those students with disabilities, who are presently achieving behind their peers, to have less content-based knowledge than teachers of non-disabled students who are also behind grade level.

Several groups, including TASH, the League of SpecialEd Voters, and Our Children Left Behind, opposed the bill stating that S.1248 will hurt our children by:

- removing short-term objectives from IEPs,
- allowing children with disabilities to be removed from classrooms for non-disruptive, non-dangerous behaviors,
- restricting the due process rights of families.

Air Travel Hotline

Announcement from the Department of Transportation

Abstract: an announcement from the Department of Transportation to promote use of the Toll Free Hotline for air travelers with disabilities for information regarding rights and for assistance in resolving issues.

Key Words: disability, rights, Department of Transportation, air travel, Toll Free Hotline, News & Views

The U.S. Department of Transportation is calling on all disability organizations to promote public education about its Toll Free Hotline for air travelers with disabilities through their organization newsletters, listserves and sponsored events.

The Toll Free Hotline for disabled air travelers has been in operation since August 2002 and is available for callers from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern Time, seven days a week. It is currently not being fully utilized. The Hotline serves two main purposes: (1) education and (2) assistance in resolving disability-related air travel problems.

Many disabled air travelers are not aware of their rights and the Hotline, in part, exists as an educational service to inform air travelers with disabilities about their rights under the Air Carrier Access Act and the Department's implementing regulations 14 CFR Part 382 (Part 382). Hotline operators are well versed in the ACAA and Part 382 and can provide callers with on the spot general information about the rights of air travelers with disabilities. The Hotline operators also respond to requests for printed consumer information about air travel rights of the disabled.

The Hotline can also assist air travelers with disabilities in resolving real time or upcoming issues with air carriers. The purpose of "real-time" assistance is to facilitate airline compliance with DOT's rules by suggesting to the passenger and the airline involved alternative customer-service solutions

to the problem. The airline remains responsible for deciding what action will be taken to resolve the issue in accordance with the ACAA and Part 382. Generally, if a caller has a real time problem or an upcoming issue with an air carrier, a Hotline Duty Officer will contact that air carrier and attempt to resolve the issue. For example, there have been a number of incidents in which Hotline Duty Officers have contacted air carriers and convinced them to accept service animals and electric wheelchairs on board flights, to stow folding wheelchairs in the cabin, and to provide requested wheelchair assistance.

Air travelers who want information about the rights of persons with disabilities in air travel or who experience disability-related air travel service problems may call the Hotline to obtain assistance at: 1-800-778-4838 (voice) or 1-800-455-9880 (TTY).

Air travelers who want DOT to investigate a complaint about a disability-related issue still must submit their complaint in writing via e-mail at <airconsumer@ost.dot.gov> or postal mail to: Aviation Consumer Protection Division U.S. Department of Transportation, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

To request flyers promoting the Hotline to distribute to your membership, contact (202) 366-1617 (voice) or (202) 366-0511 (TTY).

Tell Me Service, 1-800-555-8355

By Beth Dennis, Children's/Transition Consultant, DARS Blind Services Division

Abstract: This article describes a telephone information service that provides local travel information, as well as news, sports and entertainment information.

Key Words: travel, Tell Me Service, local information, News & Views

A colleague informed me of the Tell Me Service, a telephone service he has used to obtain local travel information, as well as news, sports and entertainment information. A friendly computer-generated female voice answers the telephone, "Good afternoon. Welcome to 1-800-555-TELL," and provides all the categories of information. These categories are Stock Quotes, News, Sports, Entertainment, Travel, and Short Cuts. Each of these categories has a menu. For example, the menu under the travel section includes Airlines, Hotels, Rental Cars, Taxi, Weather, Traffic, and Driving Directions. The service will obtain location information and connect the caller free of charge to a taxi service. This service will also connect the caller free of charge to the airline, hotel or rental car of their choice, as well as provide weather, traffic and driving directions. The driving directions were clear and easy to follow. Although it was unable to locate the address for the DARS Administrative Building, it was able to provide directions from the intersection where the building is located.

The menu for the Entertainment section included Movies, Horoscopes, Soap Operas, and Black Jack. Using the menu

guide, I was able to identify a movie and locate the nearest theater and playing time. It also provided the option of purchasing a ticket over the telephone.

Head of Deafblind Medicaid Waiver Retires

Abstract: Steve Schoen, who created the Texas Medicaid Waiver for people who are deafblind with multiple disabilities, has retired from the Texas Department of Human Services.

Key Words: News & Views, Services, Deafblind, Community, Medicaid Waiver

The Texas Deaf-Blind/Multiple Disabilities Program lost a strong advocate for people with deafblindness when Steve Schoen retired from the Texas Department of Human Services in June. Steve has been a champion for this program ever since he took the position almost 15 years ago. Steve was instrumental in converting the program to a Medicaid Waiver that allows individuals age 18 and older to access funds to support them in living outside of institutional settings. This includes support to individuals living both with their families or in the community, allowing them to have meaningful days and continued opportunities to learn. The program also provides funds to allow children and adults who are deafblind to attend a one-week deafblind session of camp near Dallas each year, and funds the annual DBMAT weekend Family Conference at Camp John Marc.

We will all miss Steve and the excellent job he has done, but we know that he will enjoy pursuing other interests such

as playing the piano in jazz clubs. Though he may no longer be the man to call for questions about the Deafblind Waiver, we have every reason to believe he will continue to be involved in advocating for services to people with deafblindness. Thanks Steve, for all the good things you have helped bring about for individuals with deafblindness and their families.

We welcome Cindy Eilertson as the new program administrator, and look forward the continued health and contribution of the Texas Deaf-Blind/Multiple Disabilities Program.

Invitation to Participate in a Community of Practice on Interveners

Abstract: An announcement of a Community of Practice for interveners and paraprofessionals working with deafblind youth and information about the function and need for communities of practice.

Key Words: deafblind, deafblindness, children, youth, community of practice, intervener, best practice, No Child Left Behind, National Intervener Task Force, listserv, News & Views.

The SKI-HI Institute at Utah State University and NTAC invite you to join a Community of Practice focused on Interveners and Paraprofessionals Working with Children and Youth who are Deaf-Blind.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

Communities of Practice “are groups of people who share expertise and passion about a topic and interact on an ongoing basis to further their learning...” (Zeller, 2004; Weager, 2003).

WHAT DO COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE DO?

Communities of Practice “members typically solve problems, discuss insights, and share information” while developing “tools and frameworks that become part of the common knowledge of the community...” (Zeller, 2004;).

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

The community is open to anyone who is involved or interested in the topics of interveners and paraprofessionals with children and youth who are deafblind.

WHY USE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AS A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGY

States and state deaf-blind projects are facing a variety of complex issues as they attempt to meet the paraprofessional standards of “No Child Left Behind,” as well as to determine standards and training requirements related to the use of interveners with children and youth who are deaf-blind. Although each state project must address these issues within the context of their individual state, there are many common needs for information and resources which have been identified and successfully addressed by others. Sharing these resources and strategies among others in a Community of Practice enhances the collective knowledge base through

the sharing of what others know, have developed and found to be successful.

NEED FOR THE COMMUNITY

Early intervention and educational agencies have attempted to respond to the unique needs of students with deaf-blindness in many ways throughout the years. One such response, which has been increasingly relied upon in recent years is the use of a one-to-one paraprofessional or a one-to-one intervener. Although their roles and job assignments often appear similar, paraprofessionals and interveners are typically differentiated by the amount and type of specialized skills related to deaf-blindness which are recommended for interveners. Also, a variety of topics related to the design of training systems, adoption of competencies and training systems integration into larger state paraprofessional initiatives has been identified.

Many state and multi-state deaf-blind projects have already, or are currently initiating paraprofessional and intervener training programs. What is needed is the melding of values-based content recommendations with research-based strategies into a model of recommended practices, which can then serve as the basis for the state/multi-state deaf-blind projects training activities and to further research and validation of the practices.

FOCUS OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON INTERVENERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND

Based on the needs and activities previously identified and initiated by the National Intervener Task Force and others, the

identification of recommended practices related to the use of paraprofessionals and interveners has been targeted as the initial focus of activities proposed to the Community. Five specific areas for the identification of recommended practices have been identified to date. These areas are:

- Refining competencies for interveners and paraprofessionals working with students who are deaf-blind and the content of their training;
- Designing and delivering effective training and implementing effective models;
- Integrating training activities into larger state NCLB and IDEA CSPD infrastructures;
- The design and implementation of evaluation models for documenting systems change, training and child impact;
- The identification of recommended standards of practice related to the use of interveners and paraprofessionals.

The Community will address additional focus and activities as they emerge.

PARTICIPATING IN THE COMMUNITY

The SKI HI Institute is hosting a dedicated Paraprofessional and Intervener Training listserv, which will be used as the primary discussion board for the Community. To join the listserv, simply go to the following website and follow the enrollment directions:

<http://lists.usu.edu/mailman/listinfo/intervener-para>

Once you have registered, go to: <intervener-para@lists.usu.edu> to submit postings.

Face-to-face meetings of Community members will be scheduled in future naturally occurring opportunities, such as NTAC's Annual Project Directors Meeting and/or Topical Workshops.

CONTACTS

For further information contact:

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John Killoran, NTAC
<killorj@wou.edu>

C L A S S I F I E D

Mail or e-mail your new classifieds to Carolyn Perkins:
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 West 45th St., Austin, TX 78756, or
carolynperkins@tsbvi.edu.

An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is
Posted on TSBVI's website at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

The Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT) 32nd Annual Statewide Family Conference

“Building the Spirit”



A Fun-Filled Learning Weekend for the Entire Family

October 8-10, 2004

Camp John Marc, near Meridian, Texas

For more information, contact:
Cyndi Hunley, Conference Registrar
23202 Bright Star; Spring, TX 77373
281-821-9005; chunley@aol.com

CLASSIFIED

2005 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness

Please note: a new date has been finalized: **Feb. 25-26, 2005**
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Austin, TX

Top local and national presenters will discuss issues and strategies for educating and parenting young people with deafblindness. There will be opportunities to network and build communities of committed people with an interest in children and youth who are deafblind.

Mark your calendars, and look for more details this fall.

Virginia Murray Sowell Center Distinguished Lecturer Series

September 17 & 18

Michael Collins--Director, Hilton/Perkins Program,
Perkins School for the Blind

Louis Tutt--Principal,
Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind

*Transition Strategies for Students with Deafblindness:
Living, Work, and Leisure*

Texas Tech University College of Education, Room 001
Lubbock, Texas

Contact: Dr. Roseanna Davidson 806-742-1997, ext. 246

Programming for Students with Cortical Visual Impairments

September 29-30, 2004

Sheraton Grand Hotel,
4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway (Hwy 114),
Irving, Texas 75063

Presenter: Dr. Christine Roman

Contact: Kitra Gray at <grayk@esc10.ednet10.net>

Registration: <www2.ednet10.net>

CAMP CONNECT

Third Annual Retreat for Central Texas Families of Children With
Combined Hearing and Vision Loss and Deafblindness

Saturday, September 25, 2004

Peaceable Kingdom Retreat - Temple, TX

Sponsored by Region 12 Education Service Center,
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services -Division
for Blind Services, and Texas Deafblind Outreach

Travel assistance available. This retreat is provided free of charge to families including a lunch and dinner. Travel assistance is also available for families to cover the cost of gas. For families who are unable to bring their children with them due to age or medical considerations, reimbursement to help cover the cost of child care arranged for the child at home is also available.

Overnight accommodations provided if necessary. Families traveling from over an hour-and-a-half away may also be provided overnight accommodations free of charge.

For more information, call Tina Herzberg at 254-666-0707.

SWOMA 2004

Promoting the Development of Recreation and Leisure Skills

October 30 & 31, 2004

Greene Family Camp, Bruceville, Texas (just south of Waco)

Registration materials will be available at <www.tsbvi.edu> on
August 16, 2004

6th ANNUAL SPORTS EXTRAVAGANZA

Sports Competition for Students with Visual Impairments

October 22-23, 2004

Irving High School, 900 N. O'Connor, Irving, Texas

There are no limits in this competition for athletes 22 and under who happen to have visual impairments. Activities will commence on Friday October 22 from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. with a goalball tournament for players 12-22. All other events will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday October 23.

Participant Categories: Low Organized Games (ages 0-5); Physically and/or Mentally Challenged (6-22); Low Vision & Blind (6-11); Low Vision & Blind (12-22)

Events: Parent Networking Venue; Non-Competitive Events; Wheelchair Obstacle Course; 25 Meter Walk; Ball Throw; (Tennis & Softball); Ball Strike for Distance; Shot Put; 25-400 Meter Dash; Standing/Running Long Jump; Goalball Events; Beep Ball Events; Archery

For more information or to request entry packet, call Region 10 ESC: Kitra Gray, Consultant, 972-348-158;

Randy Foederer, Consultant, 972-348-1570

Sponsored by Region 10 ESC and Lions Club International, Districts 2-X1 and 2-E2.

INSITE Trainings for 2004-05

ESC Region 7, Kilgore, TX: October 5 & 6, 2004;
November 10 & 11, 2004; December 8 & 9, 2004

Liz Adams (Region 7) and Alicia Favila (Region 10) will work together to support this INSITE training.

ESC Region 1, Edinburg, TX: October 21 & 22, 2004 (Thurs. & Fri.); December 14 & 15, 2004 (Tues. & Wed.);
January 6 & 7, 2005 (Thurs. & Fri.)

Contact: Peter Graves, ESC 1

ESC Region 14, Abilene, TX: February 7 & 8, 2005; March 7 & 8, 2005; April 7 & 8, 2005

Contact: Linda Laughlin

Distance Broadcasts from TSBVI on TETN

Contact your regional ESC consultant to see if they will be connecting to these broadcasts. Broadcasts are from 1:30-3:30 PM Central Time. Sorry, these broadcasts are not available outside of Texas.

September 22 - Section 504 and the student with visual impairments and Q&A with Marty Murrell

October 20 - Issues in deafblindness: Involving deaf education in programming for deafblind students

- November 17 - Motor issues for older students with visual impairments
- January 19 - A review of the Accessible Graphing Calculator with Susan Osterhaus
- February 16 - Conducting a Functional Behavior Analysis on students with visual impairments
- April 20 - Transition issues for students with visual impairments

Technology Training at TSBVI

These workshops will be offered on the campus of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Austin. Enrollment is limited to allow for hands-on participation. Registration information will be available after July 30 at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

- September 24 - Using Technology to Promote Emerging Literacy (presented by Donna McNear)
- October 15 - Matching Needs to Technology: Tech Assessment for Academic Track Students
- November 13 - Technology for Students with Multiple Impairments: Using a Team Approach to Assess Needs and Implement Use
- December 11 - What's New in Technology for Students with Visual Impairments: An Overview of the Latest Technology

January 21 & 22 - Using Duxbury to Prepare Materials in Braille

February 12 - Everything You Want to Know About Using Screen Readers with Email

If you have questions about these trainings contact:

Jim Durkel at (512) 206-9270 <JimDurkel@tsbvi.edu> or
Karen Scanlon at (512) 206-931 <KarenScanlon@tsbvi.edu>.

TSBVI Short-Term Programs 2004-2005

Fall Semester 2004

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| September 12 - 17 | Technology Week #1 (secondary) |
| *October 1 - 3 | Braille Olympics (5 th -8 th grade Braille readers) |
| Oct 17 – Oct 22 | Elementary IEP #1 |
| November 7 – 12 | High School IEP #1 |
| Nov 28 - Dec 3 | Math (secondary) |
| *December 9 – 12 | Middle School Independence Weekend |

Spring Semester 2005

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| January 9 - 14 | Middle School IEP #1 |
| January 23-28 | Technology Week #2 (secondary) |
| *February 10-13 | Elementary Independence Weekend |

- * February 17-20 Low Vision Weekend (secondary)
- Feb 27-Mar 4 High School IEP #2
- March 20-24 Capitol Experience (secondary)
- * Mar 31- Apr 3 High School Independence Weekend
- April 10-15 Middle School IEP #2
- May 1-6 Elementary IEP #2

* = Weekend Program

Contact: Lauren Newton, Ph.D. Principal of Special Programs
Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired
(512) 206-9119 laurennewton@tsbvi.edu

SEE/HEAR

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The audio version of *SEE/HEAR* is provided by
Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Austin, Texas

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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