

SEE/HEAR

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS
A collaborative effort of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division for Blind Services

Summer 2006

Volume 11, No. 3

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Editor's Note: Over the past year, we mourned the loss of two dearly-loved members of our deafblind family. In November, Christian Knapp, the young man who was the "great motivator" and teacher to so many, passed away suddenly at home. This spring, Everett Bryan, who as a parent of a child with deafblindness was a trail blazer for quality specialized services in Texas, passed away after fighting cancer with his typical "quiet man" style. We dedicate this issue to the memory of their lives, which have inspired and informed so many others.

Christian and His Intervener

By Melanie Knapp, Christian's Mom, Sugar Land, Texas

Abstract: One mother shares her reflections on her son's dramatic improvement in quality of life through the work of his intervener, and how her son, "the great motivator", inspired her to help others reap the same benefits.

Key Words: Family, deafblind, intervener, personal experiences, losing a loved one, family support group, Christian's Vision

In celebration of Helen Keller's birthday, June 25 – July 1 was Deafblind Awareness Week. Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880. At the young age of 19 months, Helen came down with an illness that left her deaf and blind. When Helen was a young girl, Anne Sullivan, a teacher and former student of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, became Helen's teacher.

Today, we might call Anne Sullivan an intervener. "An intervener acts as the eyes and ears of the individual who is deafblind, making him or her aware of what is occurring and attaching language and meaning to all experiences. An intervener intercedes between the individual who is deafblind and the environment in such a way so as to minimize the affects of multisensory deprivation and to empower the individual to have control over his or her life" (Henderson & Killoran, 1995). Over the past few years, there has been national and statewide activity to define and standardize the role of an intervener working with deafblind students in our schools.

My husband and I were very fortunate to have had an intervener work with our deafblind son, Christian. Christian and his intervener, Ann, were together 3 years in Fort Bend ISD. Ann helped Christian out of his dark and silent world in the short time they were together. They became "models" for deafblindness and the power of the intervener.

We referred to our son as "The Great Motivator". Throughout his life, he motivated his Dad and me to make things right for him. Christian passed away November 3, 2005.

In his memory, we are establishing a grassroots organization to support families who have been touched by deafblindness. We have a vision that all deafblind persons will have a skilled intervener working with them. To learn more about Christian's Vision, please contact me at (281) 438-6589 or <rmkrrn1@aol.com>. I have written a story, "Christian and His Intervener". Following is an excerpt from it. If you wish to read the story in its entirety, it can be found on the web at the Project Sparkle site, <<http://www.sparkle.usu.edu/christian.html>>.

ANN AND CHRISTIAN

Christian was 21 years old when he and Ann met. In Texas, Christian was allowed to attend school until he was 22 years old. Ann would have one year with Christian. We were unbelievably excited, yet cautiously optimistic. Ann admitted that Christian was the oldest deafblind child she had worked with. She had ten years of experience working in our area as an intervener. Her experience, her reputation, and her love for what she did were all evident when she became Christian's intervener.

Gary and I knew we had been given a "gift" of Ann. We were determined that Ann would have every tool she needed to help Christian.

Ann started a log that she wrote in every day to let us know what Christian's day had been like. Gary and I would write back with what he had done at home. These logs became such an important piece of Christian's progress. We spoke on the phone often. I came up to school often. I felt welcome there. Christian was in a transitional classroom. A lot of the kids had jobs to go to. His classroom teacher was very supportive of Ann and Christian. She encouraged Ann to "do her thing", and was there when Ann needed her. Christian began developing relationships with some of the other students. Ann taught them to approach Christian's hands to say hello. As time went on, Christian's friends were given sign names and symbols. Christian eventually was able to recognize them with only their sign name.

Ann, Gary, and I communicated on a daily basis. We either wrote each other in the log, spoke by phone, or in person at school. Early on, Christian and Ann spent a lot of time getting to know each other. Ann and I spoke about his previous few years at school, and how Christian needed to adjust to a busy day. She wrote me on September 27, 2001 after one of our talks. "I looked at some things differently. I am one long activity that has entered Christian's life." I laughed when I read that. Christian had "his way" of letting all of us know when he needed a break! On that same day Ann wrote, "Christian walked from the bathroom to his calendar by himself". That was the first time Christian had ever walked alone. On October 10, 2001 she wrote, "Christian walked 284 steps alone on the tennis courts today". I was so proud of my boy. Christian was also beginning to understand more signs. Ann wrote that she had signed "bathroom" to him, and he stood up and walked toward the bathroom.

By the end of the fall semester in 2001, Christian had made huge strides. He was loading his calendar box in the mornings and afternoons. He understood his routines and it was apparent that he understood many signs. Christian had begun to sign some words: "vibrator", "eat", and "walk". Four months had gone by and we had only a few more months of school before Christian would graduate.

I asked Ann to share some of her memories of Christian for this story. She wrote:

"I have so many wonderful memories of Christian. A really happy memory that comes to mind involves the first time he signed "mom". Melanie (his mom) was already in the room, but Christian didn't know she was there. Melanie and I both looked at each other and I know we were thinking...it was surreal...did Christian really sign "mom"? She had tears in her eyes and I had tears in my eyes too. I know it was a tremendous experience for Melanie to see Christian sign "mom" for the first time. It was for me."

"It was really good for Christian and for me when he first started walking with other friends. I

remember a red-haired girl was one of the first students Christian walked with. They would walk around the gym during P.E. I could tell Christian really liked being with her. It was great for me to see the two of them walking together, and it also gave Christian a break from walking only with me.”

Christian ... literally flourished before our very eyes. All of us involved in Christian’s education believed that this was only the beginning for this intelligent young man. No one could deny that fact that Christian was receiving the appropriate program for him as a deafblind person. The proof was right in front of all of us.

Gary and I did not want to face that this school year would end. Everything that we worked so hard to get for Christian would be over. We could not give our son this “life”, and then have it yanked away from him. He proved that he could do this. It was up to us to make sure that he had every opportunity to continue to grow and learn.

We began our investigation of what we needed to do for Christian to stay in school. All we wanted was to make up for his “lost” years at his previous high school and for him to stay at Dulles and have Ann continue to work with him. Sadly, we were told that Christian “ages out”. He would not be allowed to continue after the school year ended. I could not hold my tears back as we sat in his ARD. I knew these professionals. I knew that these people that sat in the room on that day felt the same way that Gary and I did. They had seen the “miracle”. Their hands were tied. We were heartbroken... but not defeated.

Gary and I had a long talk. We didn’t have a lot of money, but we knew that our next step was the right one for Christian. We hired an attorney. We knew that our only way of getting through to the district was to file a lawsuit. This is not what we wanted to do, but Christian needed us to.

Our case never went to court. The Director of Special Education in our school district called Gary, herself. Our case had been reviewed and Christian would receive two more years of education. Within a few weeks, we again sat in an ARD meeting. We would stay at Dulles, Ann would be his intervener, and the “miracle” would continue to unfold.

The next two years went by too quickly. Christian and Ann became a “model” for interveners and deafblindness. Christian thrived with his understanding of tactual sign. Gary and I took sign language classes. Ann, Gary, and I became strong accomplices for Christian. We worked in sync with each other daily. We often spoke about the importance of our relationship and our communication and how much it helped Christian. We knew that what Christian learned at school was critical to include at home as well and vice versa. We worked on building a “bridge” between his school life and home life.

Ann continued to nurture Christian’s friendships at school. Chris was his best friend. He would meet Christian in the morning and walk him into the class. Ann had taught Chris some signs to talk with Christian. Ann shares this memory between the two friends:

“I loved seeing the friendship that developed between Christian and Chris. I could tell that Christian was so comfortable and happy when he was with him. They would walk together to lunch, and they would walk together in the afternoon to wait for Melanie to pick Christian up after school. While waiting for her, Chris would sign “wait for Mom”. I know it made Christian happy that Chris learned to sign and that he learned about Christian’s calendar box. It was

good for Christian to feel he was understood and to have Chris as a friend. There was the time that Chris and Christian took off from the classroom. For a moment, I was frightened...because they left without me. I went out into the hallway and saw Christian standing with Chris while talking with a girl he liked and some other kids. It was the best feeling seeing Christian interacting with other friends.”

Ann and Christian had been going out into the community. Christian would shop at the grocery and other stores. He had a few favorite places that he liked to eat....well... eat the chocolate dessert.

We had been supported by the Texas State School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach for years. Craig Axelrod worked closely with Ann and the other team members ensuring that Christian had every tool he needed to learn, including training for Ann, Gary and me. Craig was a friend to us, and to Christian.

I began to look at Christian’s future beyond school with a new outlook. It was inevitable that this time he would graduate. It was extremely important to us to make his transition as smooth as possible. His life was full of meaningful activities, and we wanted this to continue for him.

TRANSITION

Christian’s love of chocolate found him a job. Ann had discovered early on that Christian loved chocolate. Their discovery came on Christian’s first trip to the vending machine. He had no idea at the time that “the big box” could spit out this delicious chocolate... at least he didn’t on the first trip. The next time, he knew what was coming. He quickly learned the sign for chocolate. Ann taught Christian that he could put money in the machine and get chocolate. As time went by, we expanded that theory. We bought Christian a small vending machine. We had permission to put it in the classroom. Christian learned to load it with chocolate, and other treats. He traveled to Sam’s Club to buy supplies for his vending machine. He learned to collect the money out of the machine. After graduation in 2004, we had special permission to keep the vending machine at school in the classroom. Christian went to school once a week to load the machine. He was able to visit with his old schoolmates and teachers while he was there. We were working on getting him another vending machine to be placed somewhere else in the community.

SUMMARY

The obstacles that we had to overcome for our son Christian were worth every struggle, tear, and frustration. I believe in the Intervener model. Christian’s quality of life improved dramatically because he had an intervener.

What would have happened if Christian had been with an intervener years before?

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.” (Helen Keller)

Editor’s Note: Ann, the intervener mentioned in Melanie’s article, is also described working with another student in Michelle Weth’s article beginning on page 12 in this issue of SEE/HEAR. You will see in that article that she has continued her work as an intervener who makes a difference in the lives of students who are deafblind.

The Quiet Man: Fond Reflections On Everett Bryan

By Garland and Annie Wade, Charter Members of DBMAT, Tulia, Texas;
and Pat McCallum, Past President and Executive Director of DBMAT, Seagoville, Texas

Abstract: A few friends memorialize Everett Bryan, parent of a daughter with deafblindness and a trailblazer in support for Texas families.

Key Words: Family, deafblind, parent, leadership, memorial

GARLAND & ANNIE'S REFLECTIONS

We first met Jackie and LeeAnn in 1971 in their home in Amarillo. Everett was away from home that day at work as a highway engineer. They were among the parents attending the first deaf-blind parent's meetings in Austin, sponsored by the Texas Education Agency. During the second or third of those meetings in 1976, a few parents met through the night to author the bylaws that established the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT). Everett in his quiet wisdom was there to help lead the small group. Through the years several of us charter parents of DBMAT have fallen away for one reason or another...but never Everett and Jackie. They remained steadfast in their activity and in support of DBMAT. Having gleaned the choicest bits of information that DBMAT offered each year, Everett takes with him that quiet-found intelligence along with numerous friendships that mounted through the years. We are certain that his eternal heart is now a vessel containing the respect of everyone who came in contact with him here on earth. He did not command attention . . . but his presence filled the room. He did not sparkle . . . but his light filled the shadows. He never spoke harsh words . . . his example was chastisement enough. Our memories of this quiet, loving, unassuming man (A "David" among the Goliaths of life) . . . are his legacy to us. And we who knew him, or knew of him, and many who may never know him, are the beneficiaries of that honorable life well lived.

PAT'S REFLECTIONS

I feel I've known the Bryan family all my life. I've certainly known their smiling faces, encouraging words and gentle support for all of my DBMAT life. In the early 70's, we began this unique journey together along with several other families of children who are deafblind.

Everett was treasurer during my tenure as president, and for several of my years as executive director of DBMAT. I felt Everett had a "John Wayne" persona with his strength of character, willingness to assist, and determination of effort...the quiet man who got the job done.

One of my fondest memories of Everett is when, at my request, he donned a Superman type costume to become "Superparent" for a skit during one of DBMAT's annual conferences. He was a hit and saved the damsel in distress.

I feel sure that everyone who had the opportunity to know Everett has wonderful memories of this gentle man, not only to share but also to keep in their heart.

(Pat's reflections are reprinted with permission from the DBMAT Newsletter *In Touch*, Spring 2006)

Helping Your Child Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood

By Mary Zabelski, President, National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments
(Reprinted with permission from *Awareness*, Fall 2005.)

Abstract: The author, a parent of a grown daughter who is blind, shares practical strategies parents can build into their family routines to help children develop the skills necessary to be successful adults.

Key Words: family, blind, transition, personal experience, parent tips, expanded core curriculum

*Editor's Note: The National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) is a nonprofit organization of, by and for parents committed to providing support to the parents of children who have visual impairments. This year, NAPVI celebrates 25 years of outreach to families. To learn more about the organization, you may visit their website at <www.napvi.org>. Mary Zabelski, who has been active in NAPVI for many years, contributed to the *Awareness* 25th Anniversary Edition by sharing *Cara's Story and My Journey*, an article that highlights her experience of having a daughter who is blind.*

Planning for your child's move from adolescence to adulthood is a very important step you can provide, and one of the most important factors in building a successful future for your child. In most states, special education transition services begin when a child with a disability is between 14 and 16 years of age. You will be told that this is the time to look at developing new skills and working with your child together as he or she moves toward independence. You will probably not be prepared. Unfortunately, teachers and professionals in the field should be encouraging us to work on these skills much earlier in our child's development.

As you encourage your child to take on more responsibilities you will want to find new ways to be supportive. As you help your son or daughter maneuver through post-secondary challenges, you will be looking at everything from college to employment, from housing to financial assistance. Depending on your child's disability, you may be considering other options as well.

Although the law (I.D.E.A.) tells us that during the high school years a transition plan will be established for your son or daughter through their Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.), many of us with older children have realized that the real transition starts much earlier in life, and rests with the family.

As parents, we have to help build our children's self-advocacy skills. Hopefully, our children have gained a strong sense of their own strengths, talents, abilities and areas of interest. If our children have a disability, they should be conscious of how it can affect them in the community, work environment or academic environment. They need to be able to discuss these issues and learn how to ask for and acquire any supports and accommodations that they might need and be entitled to receive. They need to be familiar with the systems that are in place so they can access these supports and accommodations.

When our children are in elementary and high school, the school system takes care of ordering their assistive technology and instructional materials, with their much needed accommodations and adaptations. Once our children are out of high school they are expected to find their own services or seek out the necessary assistance on their own.

I have found that the basic foundation for advocacy skills begins when our children are much younger. It is very important for us to encourage self-esteem in our sons and daughters. Without self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities, it will be hard for them to advocate for themselves.

One factor to consider is to the opportunity to help others. Most people want to help our children because of their blindness or other disabilities. Giving our children opportunities to take care of siblings, chores to help within the family, or errands to run are all examples of opportunities that can be tailored to their abilities while at the same time giving them confidence that they can succeed like any other child.

Giving your son or daughter domestic responsibilities at a very early age, such as putting away toys, taking out the garbage, walking the dog with you or siblings, setting the table, helping to give the baby a bath, are everyday tasks that lead to a mastery of chores and confidence. Parental attitudes are very important to your children and are noticed by them at a very early age. Let your children know that you have confidence in them. If you feel sorry for them and do everything for them, how can they feel good about themselves? Instead, encourage them to try new things, ask them to help you when you need assistance with chores, and give them plenty of opportunities to practice. My daughter hated to be seen in public with her cane, but I made her walk to the corner store or to mail a letter in the mailbox, and then would thank her for helping me. Eventually, she got used to performing tasks like this, which ultimately led to her independent traveling. These tasks also made her feel important to the family, since we relied on her to help out with household tasks and run errands.

Social relationships and opportunities to participate in sports and recreational activities are more than just fun. They are important tools that help integrate our children into the local community and increase the opportunities for collaboration and building of a support network. Help your son or daughter connect with other families, social groups, professional persons, sports programs, religious community members or any other persons or groups that could help provide social, recreational, work or volunteer experiences for them. Also, helping your child find community members with the same disability can often give them the opportunity to see an older role model and get positive information on living and working independently.

Independent travel skills, social interaction skills, use of assistive technology, recreational and leisure skills, independent living skills, career education and visual efficiency skills (the extended core curriculum) are very important in the scheme of things and are not often taught in school as they should be. As parents, we must be the initial advocates and teachers, so our children will learn these skills from us and learn how to advocate for themselves when they are young adults. This is not an easy task but is possible if we partner with specialized teachers and other parent mentors to work on these skills at an early age. Remember, the road to independence begins at a very early age and real transition skills development should begin when your child is very young.

Supermarketing

by Carol J. Castellano

Reprinted with permission from *Future Reflections*, Special Issue 2004. *Future Reflections* is a publication of the National Federation of the Blind.

Abstract: A mother shares how she turns trips to the grocery store into opportunities for her daughter who is blind to learn about a few essential areas of the expanded core curriculum.

Key Words: family, blind, concept development, expanded core curriculum, parent tips

My daughter Serena loves our weekly trips to the supermarket. Her fun begins outside the store, where she chooses just the right basket to sit in. Then we make the automatic doors open. This must seem

like some sort of magic to a child, opening onto an interesting world of smells and sounds and tastes and people and, from a parent's point of view, learning opportunities. Serena was three-years-old when we began our supermarket routine. You can adjust your 'lessons' to the level of age of your child.

"Serena, Daddy needs some pears," I announce as we enter the produce department and we begin to choose a few. "Is this a good one?" I ask her. "Does it have a good smell? See how it feels. Here's the stem! Oh, look, there a leaf on that stem! Let's get a plastic bag to put our pear in."

Serena helps me peel a bag off the roll and helps to tear it along its perforated edge. As we put in the pears, we count them. "One, two, three, four. That's one for Daddy, one for Mommy, one for Serena, and one for John. Do you think that's enough pears? Let's feel them through the bag. Can you feel four pears in there?" On to the apples. "Hmmm, these apples feel different from the pears, and they smell different, too. But look they have stems. Apples and pears both have stems."

We go on through the produce department discussing each of the fruits and vegetables that our family eats. I find that giving Serena a personal fact or two about each item makes it more meaningful to her. "Mommy likes Delicious. Daddy likes Macintosh." Or we might sing a song (Apples and Bananas, or Day-O) or talk about the guacamole we're going to make out of the avocado. I also use storybook details to expand Serena's world. "Look, here is parsley, just like Peter Rabbit was looking for in Mr. MacGregor's garden." In these circumstances, Serena is very willing to handle and explore things she ordinarily would be reluctant to touch, such as lettuce or broccoli.

In order to give her an idea of how much food a supermarket sells, I tell her to lean over and reach out her hand. "This is a long aisle! Serena, they have cookies and cookies and cookies and cookies and cookies and cookies in this aisle!" I tell her as her hand passes over package after package. We do this in several aisles, using items that she is particularly fond of or interested in. I include as much incidental information as I think Serena can absorb while still having fun. If the new information can build on something already known, it will be easier for the child to learn. For example, "The bread in this package is made from wheat. Do you remember when we saw the wheat at the farm?" You could include whatever information would be relevant to your child. Think about what knowledge he or she already has that could be added to.

Serena's favorite aisle, after cookies, is the dairy aisle. She loves to handle and count the packages of cheese, the containers of milk and orange juice, and the eggs in the carton. All kinds of learning can go on here. "This carton of milk is much smaller than the carton of orange juice." (Use the terms quart and half-gallon if your child is ready for them.) "Wow, the orange juice is so heavy I can hardly pick it up." We drop it cautiously into the cart behind her and listen for the thud. "The juice inside the container comes from oranges just like the ones we chose before. You have to cut the orange open and squeeze it to get the juice out. Serena, help Mommy check the eggs. We don't want to bring home any broken ones. Let's count them. Twelve, that's a dozen. We'll have these eggs for breakfast tomorrow."

I try to let Serena take each item from the shelf. If she cannot reach, I put it in her lap so she can look at it. Then I say, "Let's put it in the basket BEHIND you." Heavy emphasis on the "behind" got Serena to learn that particular preposition and its meaning very easily. The supermarket cart seat is also good for "beside you" and "next to you" and Mommy is standing "in front of you." You can practice memory skills by asking "Do you remember where I put the bananas? Yes, they're on the seat next to you."

Throughout the store we talk about shapes and sounds and textures. “The peanut butter jar is round.” “The macaroni in this box makes a lot of noise when you shake it. When the macaroni is cooked, does it still make noise? No, soft things don’t make much noise.” “These potatoes are dusty with dirt. They grow in the ground, right in the dirt. We’ll have to scrub them really well before we cook them.”

We make a stop at the courtesy desk. “Mommy has to get the check approved. Here, Serena, could you hold the checkbook for me? Now hand it to me, please, and hold my pen.” I think using proper terms such as “courtesy desk” and “approved” gives the child the best exposure to the activity and expands the vocabulary as well.

Finally to the checkout, “Serena do you hear the cash registers ringing? We’re at the checkout counter now. Mommy is putting the groceries on the conveyer belt. Do you want to feel it move? Look, here are the pretzels we took off the shelf before. I took them out of the basket and put them up here. Now the cashier will tell me how much money our groceries cost. As soon as I pay we can take our groceries home.”

Usually by this time three packages of snacks are open, we are both tired, and we can’t wait to get home. But I know the fatigue is worth it, because after every trip to the market, Serena has learned at least a few things and has further solidified the knowledge she had before. She is more understanding of, and drawn into, the comings and goings of the world around her.

Dancing In Words

By Barbara Bullard, Poet, La Verne, California

Abstract: A poet shares her experience in losing her vision through story and poems.

Key Words: family, blind, poems, personal experience, vision loss, Retinitis Pigmentosa

Introduction: I have Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and have been losing my sight ever so slowly since I was about nine. With RP, my night vision was first to go, and when it would get dark, I would travel through the fields between our neighborhood’s houses with bare feet so that my feet could “read” where I was going – the slope and grade of the ground, the textures of the terrain, revealing where I was in space—a kind of landscape-braille the soles of my feet could learn to navigate by.

When I lost the ability to discern the details in faces, I would rely on identifying a person by their “movement signature”—the shape of the body and its unique way of carving the air as it moved through a room, or across a courtyard. Now, as the shapes of things are beginning to vanish as well, there is still a “sound signature” novel to each person. Yes, even the sound of how a person moves about, and the way they stir the air and energy about them, is a kind of personal identifiable imprint. I have come to truly like this peculiar way of recognizing people.

In college I chose to major in dance, so that I could enjoy having control over the environment around me, and the way I moved through it (even if only in a dance studio, or on stage), at a time in my life when I felt my loss of sight was causing me to move with less freedom, less fearlessly. I received my bachelors degree in dance from Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, and after wandering through a few artful mediums, my feet have landed firmly in poetry—the dance of words.

I write my poems with the intent of painting moments in time, and I expect my poems to draw the reader entirely into the strings of words by evoking as many of the senses as possible. I also expect the pieces to depict not only the colors and shapes of the moments in time, but also the underlying emotion in the painting, be it bittersweet or joyful.

I move through space now with six legs, and live with my lovely black labrador guide, Yaz, in La Verne, California, a small town along the foothills on the edge of the great sprawl of Los Angeles. I am a free-lance writer and like it very much when I find myself in someone's address book with the title "poet" next to my name. I can be reached at Barbara Bullard, 3945 Bradford Street, #109A, La Verne, CA 91750, 909-392-9767, <blbullard@earthlink.net>.

AS THEY DISAPPEAR

My eyes are disappearing in the mirror.
I remember what they look like.
Curious, I lean close and look with my eyes
to find what my mind still sees.

Faces have no lines, no wrinkles, no scars.
My own cheekbones soften, the jaw line quiets.
Surprisingly, faces grow prettier, more perfect,
not dull, as they disappear.

I like this edge of sight
before dropping
into the chasm of none.

I lay my face in my hand, and speak to my eyes.
I ask them not to go, to stay a little longer.
As if happenstance could be ordered.

These eyes, my friends, work so hard
carrying words letter by letter,
carrying fragments of the world in puzzle pieces,
looking as if smeared by rain or tears,

piece by piece to my brain.
Pieces of letters, pieces of faces,
fragments of worn color,
the faded ghosts of landscapes.

I like the edge of sight
before dropping into none.
I will miss my eyes when they go.

I will miss them.

WRITE ME THE STARS

These things that hang
in your sky, gone so long now
from mine—my black
and lonesome nightscape,
the blank light-white disk of a moon,
its only adornment.

These mysterious points
of brilliance, do they wink
like thoughts, like impulse?
Stars dead so long now,
the heat gone out of their light,
they are invisible to my skin.

How was I to know
I should stop, and pay attention,
and memorize these
bright things missing now
from the insensate velvet
of my unrippled night sky?

How would I have known
they would disappear one day
from my heavens, and then reappear
to me only in words?
If you're listening, write me
the stars, write me your night sky.

Mentor, Teacher, or Student?

By Michelle Weth, Career & Technology Educator,
Sugar Land Middle School, Sugar Land, TX

Abstract: A general education teacher describes her experiences in with a deafblind student in class, working together with an intervener.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, interveners, sign language, communication skills, general education

In the fall of 2004, I noticed two new faces on the Sugar Land Middle School campus. One was a beautiful blue-eyed woman, and the other was a small handicapped student. At that time, I would not know the impact they would have on my life and on my teaching career.

As they passed my room on a daily basis, I would issue a friendly greeting to Ann Bielert, an intervener. She would smile and return the greeting, but was hurrying behind Trinity, who is deafblind, giving directions in sign language. Each day passed and our conversations grew a little.

The previous year I had developed a relationship with one of the paraprofessionals in the Life Skills classroom. We would often laugh, giggle and discuss life about the campus. It was Becky Luetkemeyer who encouraged the relationship between Ann and me. I am so glad she did; for her I am very grateful.

Ann stopped by my room one day to see if I would entertain the thought of Trinity attending my class. She explained that Trinity needed the skills I taught. Fear ran through me. Several thoughts raced through my mind. How am I going to communicate? How is she going to see? What can I teach her? What are her capabilities? She is only a 6th grader. I don't teach sixth grade students... never have—never will! (I ate those words the next week.) IS Ann coming with her, or is she coming alone? Help! Am I crazy? As the words rolled out of my mouth.... “Sure, bring her in at 4th period. That is my smallest class, and I know she will enjoy the other students.” Oh-no, what will the other students do or say to her? What have I done! PANIC!!!!

Ann showed up with Trinity the next day and that was the beginning of my relationship with two people who would have a TREMENDOUS impact on my life. First, we needed a “sign” for me and I needed to know Trinity's name sign. I really liked my sign, a “W” signed over my hand for sewing teacher. The students were just beginning to make a pair of boxer shorts on the sewing machine. Another wave of panic: how was a deafblind child going to sew on the sewing machine and not sew her fingers or mine, or who knows what!!!!?????

I learned so much that next 6 weeks.... We made up signs for equipment in the room. I could not remember from one day to the next what they were. I watched Ann for help. She would stand behind Trinity and give me the sign. Trinity & I could talk! I was amazed. I was so impressed with her abilities; Trinity was and is so motivated and eager. She taught me additional patience and understanding during that first week. She chose lizard fabric for boxer shorts and set into the project. I was not sure if Ann knew what to do either at that point, but we persevered.

Out came the pattern and a pair of scissors. We traced the cutting line with a bright green marker. I learned that this was best for my other students too, as this was generally their first cutting experience. She carefully cut the pattern. WOW, it was really good, and she was very careful. I learned the sign for

“careful.” My sign vocabulary was increasing rapidly. I showed her how to pin and marked the spaces with a marker and then turned to help other students in the class. When I returned she had completed the pinning and had carefully folded the project and was returning it to her “green box.”

Over the next weeks Trinity learned new signs for sewing at a rate much faster than I did. She practiced on the sewing machine, just like the other students on paper first. She was accurate and careful. I noticed she had a hard time learning where to start and stop, so we put a “green dot” for start and “red” for stop. Great O & M skills! And, I learned the sign for STOP! With her shoe off, she began her sewing project. She could feel the sewing machine better through the pedal with the shoe off. We converted the start and stop dots from the paper to green and red pins on the fabric. Sewing is all a sequence and a set of skills. The adaptations that I have made for Trinity have moved to regular educational class teachings. The beginner sewing students can use these adaptive skills to make their skills better. Over the next weeks Trinity finished her first pair of shorts and was so proud of her work, and so were Ann and I.

Winter break was upon us, and when we returned in the spring we would do a unit on child care and then begin cooking. I had no clue what was in store for me next. A whirlwind of activities! Child care was great. Trinity created a room for her dolls and learned to care for them. Make believe time was a great educational experience for her. But the cooking was going to be more FUN than I could imagine!

Ann had been working with her on skills in the kitchen. She showed me her recipe collection and explained how she read. “Read... I can’t believe it,” was my thought! I sent down some practice ingredients for the recipe that we were making each week. Ann and I worked at converting my recipes into easy to read large print picture recipes. Sometimes we finished up minutes before the class. Well, now I am a large print picture recipe addict! Trinity practiced, I learned, and soon we were in sync making great things. I watched a delightful face enter my room. She smiled, made friends, and learned skills in 45 minutes, 3-4 days a week.

We have a great time. She likes to wear my watch when she is in my class. We exchange the watch for a bracelet. We have fun in class learning names for the students and practicing names. She likes to visit with the other students and sometimes doesn’t want to sit down and get busy. On demo days, she has become my “guest chef” and assists with the weekly demo while the other students watch in amazement. They get great satisfaction from knowing, understanding, and communicating with Trinity. They visit with her in the hallway and many have their own name signs. The class is learning sign language and more skills than I would have ever expected.

I have learned what an intervener is. WOW, I have decided that I am not just a teacher, but I am an intervener in the lives of all children. Ann Bielert has been a great teacher, friend and mentor. She has taught me so many valuable speaking (sign language) lessons. I learned I need to be careful where I place the signs! I have used the small amount of intervener training to help underachieving students make strides in their education. The organization, calendaring and unique educational process of the deafblind student can and will make an impact on the regular education processes of my classroom.

Thanks for bringing Trinity and Ann into my life. Now one and half years later, the relationship has gone full circle. I am no longer timid about my expectations of Trinity’s abilities... I now think, “let’s try!” Each day I know she is going to teach me something that I can use to educate other students. I have changed my style of teaching because of my time with her. Trinity is now my mentor and my teacher and I am her student!

I Can Do That!

By Sharrie Lyon, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Sweetwater, TX

Abstract: A teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) describes teaching strategies she used with a challenging young student in the primary grades. The student's attitude and determination to learn, combined with the efforts of his teachers and positive experiences with peers, helped him achieve far more than expected.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, TVI, Braille, Mountbatten brailier, reading, math, independence, self-confidence, motivation, behavior, PPCD

PROGRAMMING

I think every teacher wonders at times if she can do the things she is expected to do with a student. As a TVI I face this issue over and over again with each new child I serve. I remember thinking about one child in particular, "Can I really do this? Can I take the knowledge I have gained and pull this child up to where he needs to be?" Talk about being scared! Being a brand new TVI, I did not have a lot of experience to pull from. But, I decided to just take one day at a time and dove right in.

The child I was working with was very headstrong. He definitely knew what he wanted and that was for me to leave him alone. Anything I asked him to do would set off huge tantrums. Not the easiest child to work with, but mine to teach. I started by giving him choices in the work he did. If he was reluctant to make a choice (not an option) and started to tantrum, I just waited him out.

I made a simple tactual calendar system that helped him to transition to different activities. He liked it! He began to look forward to the activities and to school. By the end of the year in PPCD he was attempting to track tactile lines as he pretended to read. He knew all but two or three letters in Braille. He was enjoying school so much, he would cry to come to school even if he was ill.

The next year he went to kindergarten. We worked on reviewing all the letters, learning numbers and punctuation marks. Then suddenly he was reading! If you asked him to complete an assignment, he would say, "I can do that!" And he would.

Math was his favorite subject. Any new concept he was taught, he could do in his head. He was enjoying the abacus, and learning to add money. He loved learning the clock. Analog or digital, it didn't matter to him. I decided to try Nemeth Code with him, with absolutely no problem! After he learned to drop down on the Perkins Brailier, all I had to do was ask him where he thought a Nemeth number would be on the Perkins and his fingers would find it. I thought Nemeth was supposed to be hard to learn. In this case it was both easy for me to teach and easy for him to learn.

He learned the addition, subtraction, and the equal signs quickly. He had no trouble reading his math problems and he was happy to answer the problems using his Perkins Brailier. We worked on learning to add money and identify coins. He enjoyed the work and was satisfied when he had the right answers.

One morning, walking into the classroom, I looked for my student and couldn't find him. All the students were in the floor in groups of 3 to 4 playing center games. He was sitting in the floor with 2 to

3 other students playing a center game that I had modified. The students in his group were helping him play by showing him how to hold his cards so he could read the brailled words.

He was learning to use the Mountbatten in class. He enjoyed the feed back from brailleing the letters and having the Mountbatten talk to him as he brailled. It helped make brailleing easier and a little quicker. Using the Mountbatten, he began learning whole word contractions and thought it was fun. The Perkins and the Mountbatten became just another part of the class.

First grade was different. The pace was faster with a lot more work to be done in a short period of time. I felt the most important area to work on was independence, and that meant learning to put his paper in the Braille independently. I was able to learn a tip from a gentleman visiting our district. His advice, hole punch the paper on the left side to help orient the paper. "This will help him to put the paper in by himself", he said. I tried it; with practice I could see a big improvement in this skill in a short amount of time. By January, he was putting the paper in independently but still needed help straightening the paper so it would roll in the Perkins. Not bad, lots of progress in a short time, but we still need to work on it.

Reading took up a lot of the time during the morning. He was doing well, but I was looking for a way for him to participate in the AR program and get a reward for hard work at the same time. I tried the Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic Program with digital talking books. After he had read several AR books in Braille, and if he had all of his other work completed, he would read a digital talking book and take an AR test on it. He had as many points as the other good readers in the classroom. I placed his Braille books and digital talking books in the library so he could check out books just like the other kids.

One of the other students in the classroom told me, "When I'm done with my papers, I sit here and listen to Devin work. He's cool".

At times he would ask me, "Did I beat the other kids?" as he read through his assignment. In fact, he did beat the other kids at times. Wow! What a hard worker this kid was. Of course, his hard work made extra work for me. I was having trouble just keeping up with the amount of Braille he needed.

When I think back to our beginning I see such a tremendous change in this student. Now he is so willing to try new things. He is confident and determined. There is nothing he doesn't think he can learn to do. This attitude is what will take him far, very far I hope.

I want to see this student go on to college. I see him getting a job, making friends, having a family, and enjoying his life. I think he can do anything he sets his mind to do. More importantly, he thinks he can do it.

Not every student I teach will make such great strides. Some children will challenge the knowledge I have and send me back to my books and mentors to learn more about what approach he or she might need. But even when I am faced with new challenges as a TVI I will remember what I did with this student; his success made my job feel easy. I know that just like my student, much of what I can accomplish with a child depends on my attitude. Just as I try to motivate my student to believe they can do it, I need to believe that I can, too.

Optic Nerve Hypoplasia

By Ann Adkins, Education Specialist, TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: This article examines Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) and describes some of the characteristics of students with ONH and related conditions such as Septo Optic Dysplasia (SOD).

Key Words: Programming, visually impaired, blind, optic nerve hypoplasia, septo optic dysplasia, sensory integration, autism

I recently had a fascinating conversation with Christopher Sabine who had contacted TSBVI Outreach about his business, ONH Consulting. I was excited to hear that there is a service available to support individuals with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH), which according to Mr. Sabine's letter and his website <www.onhconsulting.com>, is the third most common cause of childhood blindness in the United States. I found the information and website particularly valuable since Christopher is an adult with ONH. In Texas, there are currently 313 students on the VI registration with ONH and 43 students with Septo Optic Dysplasia (2006 Annual VI Registration). There are additional students listed as having Optic Nerve Disorder and Optic Nerve Dysplasia. I know that many people consider these terms to be somewhat interchangeable and may use them to describe the same conditions. I have excerpted some information on ONH from Mr. Sabine's website and his letter to Outreach, and hope that in the future I will be able to interview him about his personal experiences with ONH and his career as a social worker in Ohio. Be sure to look for more information on ONH in future issues of *See/Hear*.

PROGRAMMING

WHAT IS OPTIC NERVE HYPOPLASIA?

Optic Nerve Hypoplasia is a congenital condition characterized by underdevelopment of the Optic Nerve and adjacent structures of the midline area of the brain. There is no known cause for ONH. While only a few cases of this condition were reported in the medical literature before 1970, the numbers of children born with ONH seem to be increasing dramatically.

For people with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, the optic nerve is either nonexistent or did not develop properly. Many people with ONH also have malformation (dysplasia) or absence (agenesis) of other structures of the midline of the brain that are physically near the optic nerve. These might include:

- The Hypothalamus, which coordinates the production of many vital hormones
- The Pituitary Gland, which oversees the function of many of the glands in the human body including the adrenal gland and is sometimes called the master gland
- The Corpus Callosum, which is the structure that separates the right and left sides of the brain, and
- The septum Pellucidum, a small, fluid-filled sack in the midline part of the brain. When this structure is missing or malformed, many doctors refer to the condition as Septo Optic Dysplasia (SOD) or De Morsier's Syndrome.

Children with ONH can have abnormalities in the structure of the brain, its function, or both. These abnormalities can be minor and have little to no impact on a child's functioning and development. In some children, however, these abnormalities can lead to developmental delays and other challenges. Many of these challenges include difficulties with sensory integration, motor planning, intelligence and aca-

demic skills, speech and language, and higher order communication and social skills. Children who are most severely impacted can have smaller than normal brains as well as cysts (fluid-filled sacks) in their brains which sometimes have to be drained with an implanted surgical device called a shunt. Children and adults with ONH demonstrate a full range of intellectual functioning from mental retardation to high intelligence.

WHAT ARE SOME MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF ONH?

Optic Nerve Hypoplasia is associated with a host of unique characteristics that distinguish it from blindness or visual impairment due to other causes. Children with ONH can exhibit a wide range of vision, from fairly good visual acuity to total blindness. They may have rapid, involuntary eye movements. This is called nystagmus. Since nystagmus is involuntary, it is impossible for the person to control.

Many children with ONH have sensory integration dysfunction and autistic behaviors and characteristics. Sensory integration is a term that describes how our bodies process the information we receive from our senses. In people with sensory integration difficulties, this process doesn't work as it should. Children with ONH that have sensory integration difficulties might be highly sensitive to certain textures, sights, sounds, smells, or other features of the environment. They might demonstrate a high pain tolerance and run into dangerous situations with reduced consideration for their safety. Extreme food preferences are very common. They might exhibit inappropriate and stereotyped behaviors, including hand-flapping, body-rocking, head-banging, biting or hitting parts of the body, and eye-pressing. While these behaviors can occur in other children who are blind or visually impaired, they can be much more pervasive and difficult to extinguish in children with ONH. Distractibility, impulsivity, and trouble focusing and staying on task are also typical behaviors in children with ONH that have sensory integration dysfunction.

Many children with ONH demonstrate autistic characteristics and some have behaviors that qualify them for a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum by a psychologist or another professional qualified to diagnose behavioral disorders. A child with ONH might have difficulty maintaining appropriate social interactions, rigid adherence to routines, and perseveration (talking excessively) on a specific and narrowly defined topic of interest, such as Rod Stuart or the sounds of telephone equipment. In many cases when perseveration occurs, it is on a topic related to music. Music is often a powerful motivator or even a primary means of communication for children with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Delays in areas such as adaptive functioning, social skills, and gross and fine motor skills are very typical, and global developmental delays are also prevalent.

Like some people with autism and related conditions, some children with ONH also demonstrate special narrowly-defined skills which are unique to them. These are called "splinter" or sometimes "savant" skills. (Christopher, for example, can multiply large numbers in his head and recite the names of the first 107 elements of the Periodic Table in numerical order). Some others are profoundly gifted musically.

Children with ONH can also face a host of secondary medical complications. In many cases, structures adjacent to the optic nerve are also underdeveloped, malformed, or even nonexistent. When structures such as the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland are impacted, children can have difficulty regulating their body temperature, metabolism, and other vital body functions properly. Some children are unable to produce adequate quantities of essential hormones, such as Cortisol, which the body needs to

adapt to stress and regulate blood sugar and energy levels adequately. These children need to take synthetic hormones regularly. In particular, when the body's level of Cortisol becomes too low, it can lead to a life-threatening condition known as an adrenal crisis. A person without enough Cortisol or growth hormone might have low blood sugar, called hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia can also lead to serious medical complications, including unconsciousness and seizures in severe cases. If the pituitary gland is not functioning properly or at all, the person's ability to produce hormones responsible for normal sexual development can be affected. Fortunately, a person who is unable to produce sex hormones can have normal sexual development with hormone replacements.

CONCLUSION

Children with ONH face a wide variety of challenges. They include blindness or visual impairment, medical complications such as hypopituitarism, sensory integration difficulties, developmental delays, and seizure disorders. They can require a full range of support from families and professionals from many disciplines in order to successfully navigate school and develop into productive and successful adults. ONH is a condition that impacts every child differently.

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Assistive Technology Resource on the Family Center Website

By Patrick Van Geem, Assistive Technology Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: This article describes the services available from The Family Center on Technology and Disability, including their database of abstracts about assistive technology resources for students with disabilities.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, assistive technology, resources, Family Center on Technology, Assistive Technology database

In early 2005, The United States Department of Education offered a grant to the Office of Special Education Programs for the development of a very large database on issues concerning assistive technology for children with disabilities. The Family Center on Technology and Disability, the program that produces information for the project, gathers resources from books, articles, workshop handouts, video clips, and other websites, then uploads the information on to a website in the form of abstracts. The project is part of a service that the Family Center provides to organizations and programs that work with families of children with disabilities. It is managed by a partnership of organizations that also includes the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA), Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER), Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA) and InfoUse, Inc.

The more than 600 abstracts included in the database were obtained from a network of some 1900 national organizations. Before information is transcribed as an abstract and then placed on the website database, it is reviewed and evaluated by a panel of in-house professionals from the field of assistive

technology (AT). So it continues to stay current, the website <www.fctd.info> is updated periodically. The database provides a wealth of information, and the panel welcomes suggestions from other sources should it not be listed in the resource database. E-mails can be sent to <fctd@aed.org>.

Searching the database is easy to do. By clicking on the “AT Resources” link (located in the column on the left side of the webpage), two subcategory links will appear in the listing: “Search Reviews” and “Search Review by Keyword”. If “Search Reviews” is chosen, three major categories appear on the webpage: assistive technology; material types; and disability. Choose the subcategories that are appropriate to the topic(s) of interest by clicking in the corresponding checklist boxes. When all subcategories are chosen, click on the “submit” button located on the bottom right side of the webpage. A search result page appears with titles of abstracts that are also links to other websites. Included under each title is a short descriptor of the topic. The “Search Reviews by Keywords” link will call up a webpage that includes a text field box on the bottom of the page. You can type either an author, keyword, or title in the text field and click on the “search” button.

The Family Center is committed to the issues of assistive technology. Besides the searchable database, the organization provides other resources such as CD-ROMs, an online conference series, monthly newsletters, and a membership database. The website also has a link labeled “AT Fact Sheet.” This page provides information such as: a glossary of AT terms; what AT is; AT and the IEP; and AT Laws.

Information on the Family Center on Technology and Disability is listed below:

Website address: www.fctd.info

Mailing Address: Family Center on Technology and Disability
Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20009

Phone: 202-884-8068

Fax: 202-884-8441

E-mail Address: fctd@aed.org

To Contract or Uncontract? Is This Still the Question for the Beginning Braille Reader?

By Ann Rash, Education Specialist, TSBVI Visually Impaired Outreach

Abstract: This article explores the effectiveness of uncontracted Braille for beginning readers and presents a strategy to help students switch from uncontracted Braille to contracted Braille.

Key Words: Programming, blind, visually impaired, reading, uncontracted Braille, contracted Braille, fluency, decoding, general education

In 2001, Cyral Miller and I wrote an article about the use of uncontracted Braille for our VI students. (*See/Hear*, Summer 2001). Since that time, we have experienced many changes in our field. We now have the opportunity to order textbooks and TAKS tests in uncontracted Braille, there continue to be national articles and research to determine the effectiveness of using uncontracted Braille, and we have uncontracted

Braille teaching materials such as *Un's the One*. We have also had the opportunity to be trained in the Struggling Readers Training for VI students, which recommends the use of uncontracted Braille as a strategy to intervene with a struggling Braille reader.

DOES RESEARCH SUPPORT THE USE OF UNCONTRACTED BRAILLE?

Each research project tells us that more research is needed. But what does the VI teacher do today if there is a young student on the caseload who needs to learn Braille? Does the research give enough information to make a decision about the use of uncontracted Braille? If the VI teacher uses the information we now have from our field, along with the research from the field of reading instruction, I believe that the use of uncontracted would be considered research-based.

PROGRAMMING

The most important point I have gained from reading the latest research in our field is that beginning with uncontracted Braille does no harm. There has been a perception in our field that if our students only read uncontracted they would have difficulty learning contracted Braille later. Hong and Erin's study did not support this perception. They state "findings... do not support the commonly held view that changing to contracted Braille later in school will impede the speed and efficiency of reading." (Hong & Erin, p. 326). My personal experience in working with VI teachers and students in the state of Texas also does not support this perception.

As VI teachers, our main emphasis has been on teaching a complicated Braille code with many rules to our young students. The classroom teacher has had the pressure of teaching the print code with its many rules. We have felt the pressure to have our students reading all of their contractions by the third grade so they can take the TAKS. The classroom teacher has felt the pressure of our students being able to pass the TAKS with other students. I think we should stop and consider what kind of pressure our students feel.

All beginning readers must begin with decoding. Print readers have one code to break and Braille readers have two. Print readers have many people in their environment to help them "break" the code. Braille readers have few.

If our students have only a few people in their environment that can help them decode the Braille, how does that impact the VI teacher's role in the student learning to read? I have heard many vision teachers say, "I am not the reading teacher." If we as vision teachers only concern ourselves with teaching the code, and we are the only ones who know the code, how do our students learn to read? The classroom teacher is responsible for teaching reading but when the child has questions about decoding the Braille and the teacher can't read the Braille, how does teaching take place?

I have witnessed the above scenario and it is frustrating for all who are involved—teachers, parents and especially the student. Many times the student is blamed for not learning the Braille fast enough and teachers begin to question if something is wrong with the student.

I have also observed a vision teacher in a general education classroom with her uncontracted Braille student when the first grade teacher was giving oral instructions on reading and writing rules. The student participated in the discussion and when it was time to practice what had been taught, the vision teacher could oversee the student reading from his brailled materials and formatting the brailled answers with his braillewriter. When the vision teacher was not in the classroom, the first grade teacher read the student's

materials because she had a “cheat sheet” of the Braille alphabet and could help the student decode words and assist with the student’s brailled answers. She was able to help the student decode with the print rules that had been discussed in class. (For example, a spelling rule—i before e except after c.). The vision teacher could still pull the student out of the classroom during part of the day, but not during the language arts block. During the pullout time, the VI teacher’s reading instruction included Braille reading, reading speed, and fluency. She was able to help the student decode new words in passages using the same terms that the classroom teacher used because she had heard the same explanations in the classroom as the student.

In the above classroom observation, the classroom teacher was the primary reading teacher and the vision teacher was a support to the instruction. (One particular student did not know the entire Braille alphabet at the beginning of the first grade. Both teachers worked very hard to help him catch up.) The student was not frustrated because the instructional vocabulary remained the same and he had people in his classroom that could decode his reading medium.

One benchmark for schools today is how well students read. Teachers are under pressure to have fluent readers in the early elementary grades. Fluency is defined as the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with expression. VI teachers have been taught that the average Braille student will not learn all of the Braille contractions until the third grade. The goal of the vision teacher has been the student’s acquisition of the contractions. Reading speed and fluency have been secondary concerns. Our young Braille reading students need the opportunity to work on fluency along with their sighted peers. They cannot wait until the third grade to begin working on fluency. The use of uncontracted allows the student to learn to read first, and then learn the Braille contractions. They are able to concentrate on reading and practice reading which builds fluency, comprehension, and speed.

A friend shared with me that she tried to take two foreign languages at the same time. She took Spanish and French and declared it was a disaster. She tried to juggle three different grammar systems (English, Spanish and French) as well as vocabulary and pronunciation. It reminded me of how our students try to learn the print rules, the 450 Braille rules, and how to read.

Fluency in reading requires practice, and with practice you also achieve speed. “Fluent reading is one key to good reading comprehension because fluent readers focus their attention on understanding the text and comprehending what they read. Nonfluent readers focus their attention on decoding, leaving less attention for comprehension.” (*Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired: Research-Based Practices*, FL Handout 2A, University of Texas, 2003).

In the January 2006 *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, an article entitled “Developmental Stages of Reading Processes in Children Who Are Blind and Sighted” uses Chall’s (1983) model of six stages of reading development. It reviews literature to determine if Braille readers followed the same developmental processes as sighted readers. The authors used examples of students learning contracted Braille. The authors concluded that “readers of both print and Braille text formats may progress through similar stages.” (p. 45). The most significant differences between the groups occur in the first three stages. The stages span from pre-reading through formal skill instruction to fluent reading. Both print and Braille readers must become fluent readers before they can advance to the next stages of reading. In the next stages, “the purpose of reading is to acquire new information—to comprehend meaning. In these later stages, the focus becomes the message, rather than the medium.” (p. 43). The differences in the begin-

ning Braille reader's progression occur because learning the contracted Braille symbols slows the reading process which, "at least temporarily, return a reader to a mode of progression that is similar to Stage 1 (formal skill instruction) until the entire character set can be assimilated into memory as a complete set of patterns." (p. 40).

My hypothesis is that once a student is a fluent reader, it is easier for the reader to learn the contractions. The student is able to use context cues to help decode the contractions because they are already fluent readers. Vision teachers have told me their experiences with foreign exchange students who have been uncontracted readers and how quickly they learn contracted Braille once they began instruction in contractions because they were already good readers. They enjoyed breaking the code of contracted Braille.

SO THE BIG QUESTION IS WHEN AND HOW DO WE SWITCH FROM UNCONTRACTED TO CONTRACTED BRAILLE?

The *when* has to be determined for each individual student. When the student is a fluent reader you begin to make the switch. Keep the student in uncontracted textbooks for the year you begin adding the contractions. Braille the supplemental materials in a controlled contraction format. With the translation software available today, a teacher can control the contractions contained in the reading material based on the contractions introduced. It is important to spend time allowing the student to become fluent with each set of contractions before you introduce another set. This will allow the student to remain fluent in his reading and not compromise his comprehension.

Many of the perceived reasons for introducing contracted Braille to the beginning Braille reader have been questioned in our field. Hong and Erin conclude, "If the preponderance of research on the effects of the use of contractions indicates no differences based on that factor, it will be a sufficient reason to question the current practice of introducing contractions when a child is learning to read. If it is established that the early introduction of contractions provides no advantage in reading skills, then teachers will have support for making individual decisions on the basis of other factors, such as motivation, context and instructional setting." (pp. 338-339).

One of my goals is to convince APH to provide more uncontracted materials on quota or develop teaching materials in uncontracted Braille. As teachers of the visually impaired, we have a strong voice when we speak up for the needs of our students. If our students need uncontracted materials, it is time to speak up.

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“What’s Up” with TSBVI Outreach?

By Cyral Miller, TSBVI Outreach Director. <cyralmiller@tsbvi.edu >

Abstract: For the upcoming school year, the Outreach Program at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired will have some changes in personnel and procedures, but will continue to offer a broad range of services and assistance to professionals and families.

Key Words: Programming, blind, Deafblind, technical assistance, outreach.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Program was established as a separate division of the school in 1990. Since that time, enormous changes have occurred in educational programming for students with visual impairments in Texas. This past year, the Outreach team spent time gathering input from the field and reflecting among ourselves upon what works best, what needs to be revised or deleted, and what needs to be added to the types of assistance that Outreach staff have been providing statewide. Meanwhile, a few staff members have miraculously reached the retirement stage, and are leaving. The self-evaluation process and the retirements guided quite a few modifications to the way Outreach Programs will look and work for the future. The goal as always is to make the Outreach Program more effective and more efficient. We look forward to implementing these new systems to serve the state better and actively solicit your participation in our evolution via letters, calls and emails.

FIRST, HOW WE DO OUR WORK

There are four major areas of change for us:

- how we set up our assistance to local districts that make a request concerning an individual student program;
- how we work with ESCs for annual planning;
- how we support new professionals; and
- when we provide Outreach services.

Individual student program requests

From August through May, Outreach team members traveled on 122 on-site visits to local districts. Each quarter we reach approximately 30 different school districts to support local teams in implementing quality programming. There has been feedback that the request and preparation process is confusing, but we have gotten overwhelmingly positive feedback about the outcomes from these trips. As is typical, last year over 85% of responders agreed that there was a positive change as a result of the visit, and 90.7% of respondents rated the effectiveness of the onsite consultant as either very satisfactory or outstanding.

We want to continue to be that effective and more! Outreach and local team members have questions: Is the positive change enough to make a significant difference in the life of that student? Could we have used an alternate approach and been able to offer more constructive assistance? How effectively do these highly time and cost intensive consultations meet local needs? Are there better ways to provide support?

For these reasons, we plan to streamline the process of requesting Outreach services and enhance our local support. The requests for assistance forms and procedures will be posted on the TSBVI website for easier access. We also are hoping to provide a greater array of tools to assist local districts. For example,

if a district has questions on how to set up calendars, we hope to have links to articles, video-streaming and other tools to share, so the questions can perhaps be answered immediately, not several months when a staff member can schedule a trip. We will also electronically share incoming requests with the appropriate ESC, so that regional staff can be alerted and when appropriate support the district directly. This may cut down on delays in support to a local district.

In order to be better prepared to assist, our request process for onsite consultation will also include a way to clarify what kind of assistance is requested and what has been tried. We will then establish an action plan before leaving a site outlining positive actions to support implementation of any suggestions for change. Our goal is to make sure that when we travel to a district, we are able to truly give the best assistance possible. For this reason, we will also slightly change our internal process of assigning staff to onsite travel. It may be that different people will come to see children rather than having a single VI or Deafblind team member assigned to assist in all onsites in a particular region.

Collaborative Regional planning

Over the years, TSBVI Outreach has expanded to include a wide range of activities, including a mentor program, the deafblind Federal grant project, VI outreach, family support staff, personnel prep coordination, regional staff development coordination, APH material distribution and much more. For all of these, we work closely with the Educational Service Centers. We are in the process of developing a more systematic process for working with each ESC so that all topics are discussed with each ESC in an organized manner. We hope that through this process, we can ensure that all statewide needs are considered equally as we plan our activities.

Supporting new professionals

The mentor program is now 8 years old, and has been undergoing a yearlong evaluation process by a dedicated committee. One of the issues we have discovered is a need for more intensive support for some new professionals, particularly in isolated areas with fewer local resources, and mentors who are less available for in-person, in-district support. We have designed a new pilot program to see if we can boost our assistance in these areas based upon mentor and protégé request. As our time allows, we will provide hands-on visits in selected protégé's districts relating directly to their student caseload. Visits may be scheduled throughout the school year. Mentors will be receiving information about how to access this pilot support model from the mentor program.

Year round assistance

As statewide calendars have shifted, so too have requests for training and support. We are closely following legislated changes in academic year calendars and will try to organize our work year to be able to respond to your requests throughout the year.

AND THEN THERE ARE PERSONNEL CHANGES

Retirements

Nick Necaise joined the Outreach Program in 1996 when TEA decentralized many of the VI functions, and has been running the statewide VI registration and APH Materials system ever since. Under his guidance, those systems have become electronic and much more efficiently serve all school districts in the state. Nick is now retiring to spend time with his many beautiful grandchildren and wife, Keren. It is hard to imagine the VI field without Nick!

Craig Axelrod is also retiring. This summer he will be completing our first educational DVD, on interaction techniques with students who are deafblind, and travel to Ireland (again) before he finds out what it is like not to be at the office at 5:00 am. There are so many deafblind children and their families all across this state lucky enough to have become friends with Craig. We will all miss his hugs and positive attitude. (We have a not-so-secret plan to continue to drag him back into the field as often as possible.)

Job Shifts

Jim Durkel, formerly the Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, will move into the VI Registration and APH materials position, with modifications. He will create new avenues for training on APH materials as well as coordinate and analyze data collection tools, such as the DB Census, PEIMS reports, VI registration, etc.

Kate Moss is leaving her position as DB Outreach teacher, to become the new Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, working with ESCs to help design, coordinate and support their efforts at training professionals, paraeducators and families. She will be the facilitator of future Texas Focus conferences. Plus she and Jim together will help TSBVI Outreach continue to develop web-based and other distance-education materials.

Holly Cooper will move from her position as VI Outreach Technology teacher and join the Deafblind team as a DB Outreach teacher. She will bring her AT knowledge and experience with her and have the chance to really focus on this unique population.

Chris Montgomery will join the Deafblind team as a DB Outreach teacher. He has taught in deafblind classrooms at on the TSBVI campus as well as in the TSBVI EXIT program and has a wealth of experience across student age groups to share.

Sharon Nichols, formerly in Special Programs, will rejoin the TSBVI VI Outreach Team as an Outreach Technology teacher. We are delighted to welcome her back!

Each of these changes may create suggest other directions to move. The goal of TSBVI Outreach is to provide user-friendly, relevant, state of the art technical assistance to families and programs serving students with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities and deafblindness. We continue to evolve in order to reach that goal. We appreciate your comments, suggestions, and thoughts as we grow!



Top row, l to r: Gigi Newton, Holly Cooper, Cyral Miller, Beth Bible, Edgenie Bellah, Jean Robinson, KC Dignan, Paula Effenger. 2nd row: Pat Van Geem, Eva Lavigne, Carolyn Perkins, Ann Adkins, Kate Moss, Sharon Nichols, Ann Rash, Chris Montgomery, Karen Brown, Lisa Hayes, Stacy Shafer, Jenny Lace, David Wiley. Kneeling: Jim Durkel, Ruth Ann Marsh.

Building a Foundation of Confidence, Part 3

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

Abstract: this article reviews services available through DBS and how to access those services.

Key Words: Division for Blind Services, DARS, blindness, disability, News & Views, confidence, self-esteem, services

Welcome to Part 3 of Confidence Building, DBS-style! In the last two editions, I have shared information about DBS services for children and youth and how those services support and challenge our youth to meet their potential, to become confident and independent, and to contribute to the community. In this edition I want to continue to share some “real people” stories, stories that I hope will give a vivid picture of our services. How exactly do DBS services help our youth and families meet the challenges of life and to develop and strengthen self-esteem and independence? If you recall, in the last edition I covered the core skill areas of Adjustment to Blindness, Independent Living Skills, and Communication Skills. In this edition I plan to cover the last three of the six major skill areas: Travel, Support Systems, and Vocational Discovery and Development.

(Please note: identifying information has been changed to protect confidentiality.)

Travel Skills refers to a child’s ability to safely navigate and explore the world. The development of basic travel skills begins in infancy when a child reaches for a colorful toy, learns to sit and stand without support, or crawls toward the sound of her mother’s voice. Blind Children’s Specialists may assist families by providing a developmental assessment, attending ECI meetings, or providing recommendations for specialized toys or equipment that foster skill development. Recently I met Mrs. Jefferies, mother of 2-year-old Samuel, who was not moving around and exploring the home. Although Samuel could crawl, parents and older siblings generally carried Samuel everywhere and he had not developed the strength and stamina to walk without support. He also exhibited some anxiety about moving in space, and Mrs. Jefferies recognized her own tendency to be overprotective, especially after Samuel fell and bumped his head on the coffee table. Samuel’s DBS Specialist met with the ECI Services Coordinator, the VI Teacher, OT/PT and O&M Specialist to brainstorm solutions. The ECI team was able to loan the parent a push toy and, once Samuel had increased his strength and balance, ECI provided an Assistive Mobility Device and O&M training. The DBS Specialist arranged a group skills training with an O&M Specialist where the parent gained information about child development and was encouraged by other class participants to provide opportunities for independent mobility. The Specialist also provided ongoing counseling and guidance to support Mrs. Jefferies as she relaxed her tendency toward overprotectiveness.

For older youth, effective travel skills enable a child or teenager to learn about his community and to join his peers in social activities. In one region, Transition Counselors organized a mobility activity in coordination with VI Teachers and O&M Specialists from the Education Service Center. A group of twelve students met in the local DBS office for a group class on accessing the local transit system. Each student individually called the transit system to obtain route information to the mall, and then the group met to compare information and determine the best route. At the mall, each student was expected to make a purchase before meeting in the food court to order their own lunch. The students then planned a different route back to the office. Training also included how to communicate with the bus driver, how to identify the disembarkation point, and how to manage situations that might arise with other passengers, such as gawking or inappropriate comments.

Another core service area is the development of Support Systems. DBS helps children and families connect with a wide range of community support systems, such as peer, parent and sibling support groups; advocacy organizations; and educational support groups. Specialists and Transition Counselors also provide educational support to parents by assisting them in understanding their rights and responsibilities in the school system and supporting the parent in appropriately advocating for their child's needs in the classroom. For example, 9-year-old Norma recently experienced a substantial decrease in vision due to glaucoma; previously an honor student, she was experiencing academic and emotional difficulties in school. Norma's mother spoke little English and she felt awkward and uncomfortable speaking in the ARD meetings. The DBS Specialist met with the mother several times to review the Advocacy, Inc. booklet, "Still a Good IDEA," and together they identified primary goals for the next ARD meeting of requesting a new Low Vision evaluation and addressing Norma's emotional and adjustment issues. The Specialist accompanied the mother to the ARD meeting; although the mother indicated to the Specialist that she felt very anxious, she was able to participate in the discussion and express her concerns. As a result, the school agreed to the Low Vision Evaluation, and the Specialist agreed to locate a children's therapist covered by the family's insurance.

In another situation, a student was interested in taking a cooking class in high school, but the home economics teacher expressed concern about the student's safety in the classroom. The teacher was willing to allow the Transition Counselor to attend classes with the student, to demonstrate adaptive techniques to the class, and to mark the stove and oven.

Not surprisingly, many support services are provided through group skills trainings. Many regions facilitate parent support groups where parents can share experiences and feelings while supporting one another in facing challenging life situations and developing creative solutions to common problems and obstacles. Many times parents develop informal support groups after meeting together in trainings or medical offices, and DBS staff supports the parents by providing a meeting site and snacks.

In part I of this series, I referred to the importance of addressing Vocational Discovery and Development, the sixth core service area, at an early age. And in DBS we start these services when the child is an infant! No, we are not pressuring parents to identify a vocational goal when planning services for their 3-month-old infant, but we are talking to parents about establishing high expectations for their children, in the home, in the classroom, and in the future. Early vocational skills include the development of self-knowledge and the ability to identify your own strengths, preferences, and interests. Children also build vocational skills by completing household chores and assuming responsibility for their own schoolwork. By high school, students are beginning to identify general vocational interests, perform volunteer work, engage in job shadowing or mentoring relationships, and obtain summer or after-school jobs or internships.

Examples of DBS services that address Vocational Discovery and Development are:

- When asked about chores, Cody's mother responded that 8-year-old Cody needed to prioritize academics and, with four children in the home, she did not have time to teach him how to make his bed or wash the dishes. After further consideration, she agreed that it was important for Cody to assume the same household responsibilities as his siblings. The Children's Specialist met with Cody and his mother in the home to work on teaching Cody how to make his bed. She also made a referral to the DBS Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher who worked with Cody on folding and putting away his clothes, vacuuming, and kitchen chores.

- Several regions have developed summer work programs that include Job Readiness Training, developing a resume, interviewing for a job, and four to six week placement in a paid position that meets the student's interests and preferences.

Thank you for going on this confidence-building journey with me. These are just a few examples of the many opportunities available to blind and visually impaired children and their families. The Division for Blind Services would like to work with you and your family. If you are currently working with a Blind Children's Specialist or Transition Counselor but were not aware these services are available, please contact your provider to schedule a meeting. If you would like to work with us and are not yet enrolled in services, please contact DARS Inquiries at 1-800-628-5115 (V/TTY) — let them know you would like to apply for DBS services and they will give you contact information for your local DBS office.

Memories From the Past: Services for Preschool Blind and Visually Impaired Children

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

Abstract: a review of the history of services to preschool blind children in the U.S.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, preschool, International Preschool Seminar, Phil Hatlen, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, child development

Editors Note: TSBVI was pleased to host the 25th gathering of the International Preschool Seminar in Austin on May 10-13, 2006. We had 53 people who serve young children with visual impairments, including professionals from 16 states as well as 21 Texas practitioners. It was a joyous and interesting meeting of people with great passion and expertise in serving this special population. The following was the introductory talk given by the TSBVI Superintendent, Dr. Phil Hatlen.

Where do I begin, facing such an illustrious group? Here sits Natalie Barraga, one of my mentors, whose knowledge of services for blind children extends much further into history than mine. Here is Lee Robinson, cofounder of NAPVI, cofounder of this seminar, whose credentials related to preschool blind children are far more legitimate than mine and Stu Teplin and Deborah Hatton, whose work I have admired for many, many years. Stu, I know I met you at the first International Seminar I attended, and I wouldn't be surprised if I met you, Deborah, at the same time. Look around you, my friends, we are in the presence of giants. And it falls to me to give a brief look at the history of services to preschool blind children in the United States.

In the Fall of 1956, I was student teaching under the direction of Jeanne Kenmore in a resource room in Berkeley, California. Jeanne elected to accept a position in personnel preparation at the University of Minnesota in January of 1957, and I was hired to fill out the school year. There seems to be some confusion as to whether I began my professional career in 1956 or 1957. I have always said that it was during the school year of 1956-1957, meaning that I am now in my 50th year in this profession.

Where were we in 1956 regarding services to preschool blind children? Remember that we were already three years beyond the research that determined that excessive oxygen was the primary cause of RLF. Yet my memory tells me that parents of blind babies often came to me during my first few years of teaching, asking what they could do to assure normal growth and development for their baby.

The phrase, “Treat your blind baby just as you would any other baby”, sticks in my mind, and underscores the desperate need we had in the 1950s to deny how blind babies are different. Soon I began to say, “Have the same expectations for your blind baby as you would any baby, but seek professional help, and know that you will need to intervene when a learning experience requires learning beyond arm’s reach.”

As Natalie and Lee and some of the rest of you know, it was an interesting time. We had our heroes, such as Berthold, Nancy, Polly, Sherry, and others, but I don’t think we really knew what to do with grieving or denying or angry parents in terms of providing either comfort or answers. Somewhere in our literature, I remember a particularly profound Selma Fraiberg quote, which I’ll try to paraphrase: When we met these families, they were often without hope. Parents felt that they and their baby would be better off dead. So, more than anything else we did, we helped parents learn to love and appreciate their baby, and recognize her as being a beautifully unique human being. Sorry, Selma, that I took some liberties with what you actually said, but I know I caught the meaning of what you were saying.

There are so many people in our past that names come rushing at me that I haven’t thought about in years. Was it Laura Zetchie in Washington, Mollie Vlasnik in Oregon, Anna Elonen in Michigan, Miriam Norris in Chicago? How about Dorothy Burlingham, Jane Hallenback, Kathryn Maxfield, Arthur Parmelee? Names that live in my memory, and probably are strangers to most of you. The profession you own today was built by these people.

And what were the prevailing thoughts of these pioneers as they wrestled with issues regarding development? It would seem that, at the time I entered the profession, if a blind child was not on chronological level, she was emotionally disturbed. No, I didn’t say retarded, I said emotionally disturbed.

Read the words of Merriam Norris: Norris, M., Spaulding, P. J., & Brodie, F. H. (1957). Blindness in Children. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

”Efforts to provide such opportunities, however, usually encounter almost insuperable obstacles, in no small part because of the lack of adequate treatment and educational facilities for any child who presents serious developmental problems. In most communities there is a serious dearth of resources, either public or private, even for the treatment of so-called normal children with emotional problems. For the blind child whose problems are accentuated by the physical handicap and the prevailing lack of understanding of his needs, even such facilities as exist for the child without physical handicap are usually denied him. As a result, commitment to an institution for mentally retarded children has been the almost inevitable outcome. The high cost to society of such failure comes both in the heavy expense of institutional care throughout life and in the permanent loss of the productive capacity of the blind person. This in itself is a compelling argument for providing the needed community services at all levels which will give the blind child opportunity to use to the maximum his innate capacities “ (p. 154).

Report about the Boston Nursery for Blind Babies, 1947 by B. Lowenfeld, *The Blind Preschool Child*, New York: American Foundation for the Blind, Inc.

”All the children are residents- we have no day pupils. They may stay at the Nursery until they are of kindergarten age, but there is no minimum age level: one little girl came to live with us when she was ten days old. Not all the children stay the maximum time, for the parents are under no obligation to leave their child for any given period and we are always happy for parents who want their child and who find, through some change of circumstance perhaps, that it is possible to again include him in the family circle.

However, the majority of parents prefer that the child stay the full time, in order to gain the greatest benefit from the Nursery.” (p. 104)

The Preschool Blind Child, His Needs and Resources by Pauline Moore. *address delivered at the workshop, “The Blind Child in the Classroom”, University of Denver, June 23-27, 1958.

From: Abel, G. (1978). Concerning the Education of Blind Children (reprint). Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.

”There are also those children who are slower to develop because of a mental deficiency. However, current research points to the fact that probably the incidence of mental deficiency is no greater among a sampling of children who are blind than among children who are sighted. Moreover, other studies, notably the work of Samuel Hayes, indicate that there is no greater incidence of mental retardation among children blinded from other eye diseases.

There is, however, a group of children who present characteristics which are baffling to professional persons. Many of these children have been diagnosed as “damaged”, “psychotic”, “schizophrenic”, etc. Some of these children of school age have already been dropped from educational programs of various types and are now appearing in programs for disturbed children. All are retarded.”

During my early years in the profession, I was aware of two programs for emotionally disturbed blind in Northern California. One, a residential facility for preschool blind children, was called Clearwater Ranch, and was on the coast above San Francisco. The other was located in Richmond, California, and was a day facility for about 40 preschool blind children. I remember visiting this facility in about 1958. The director told me that if the blind preschooler had been emotionally disturbed for three years, it would take six years to reverse the effects. I’ll never forget that exchange, because it scared me more than I can tell you.

I want to share with you that, in Northern California, during the RLF era, the largest program for blind children was Sonoma State Hospital for the retarded. In the 1950s and into the 60s, it was easy for a family to convince their doctor that their own mental health was at risk if they kept their blind baby at home. So doctors referred babies to Sonoma State Hospital by the hundreds, and most are still living out their lives there. Were they retarded? Were they emotionally disturbed? We’ll never know, for at this time they are in their appropriate placement.

Now we know that not all of the multiple issues of preschool blind children stem from emotional disturbance. But I think, for those of you who may not know about this early history, there was a time when even some of our leaders were convinced that the additional disability of a preschool blind child not on chronological developmental level was emotional disturbance. Thank God we have learned a lot since that time.

Through the efforts of many of you, and others not present, developmental and educational services for infant and preschool blind and visually impaired children has greatly improved since the early RLF years. We know now that development will not necessarily parallel that of sighted children, that developmental delay and developmental differences exist and need to be considered. I’m proud of the advances made in understanding and addressing the needs of blind babies and their parents—the future for these children is bright because of the work parents and professionals do together.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Museum

Kristi Sprinkle, Intranet Administrator, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: the author describes the research and development behind the establishment of the new Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired museum, currently open on campus. A brief overview of braille writers on display is also included.

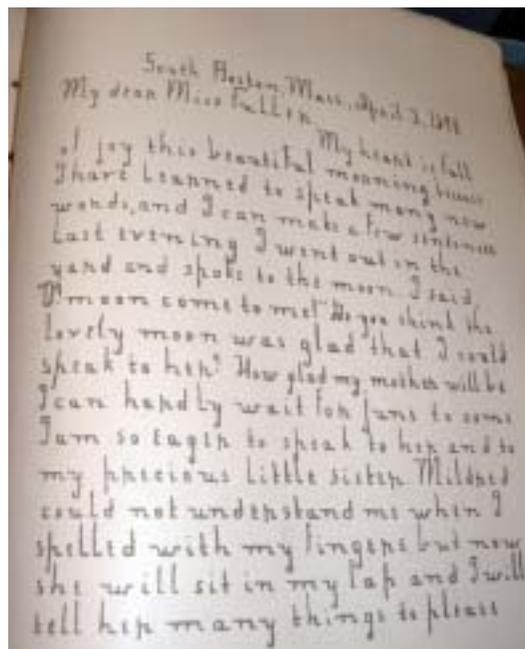
Keywords: braille, braille writers, blindness education, history of blindness, residential schools.

The idea for creating a museum of the history of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has always been on the back burner, but people have known the school should have a museum and would, eventually. For example, our librarian, Diane Nousanen, saved several items in archiving boxes that otherwise would have been tossed. Our head of maintenance kept discarded antique furniture from the turn of the century. A sheet music holder, a trophy case and other items have all been found in storage on the TSBVI campus. But a museum is more than *things*, more than just what we saved from history. The museum is our connection to the past and to the future.

While talking to Dr. Hatlen one day, I discovered that the idea of a museum of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired history was being discussed. Since I was interested in our roots, I explored this a little more and we put together a museum “team” (because the word “committee” flummoxes me every time I think about it). After the team was assembled, I was put in charge of it. And being in charge means the first thing I would need is some help. I asked the Austin Museum Partnership for assistance and received some excellent advice and someone to help guide me through the process of opening a museum.

The space delegated for the museum was in former Dormitory A. I was given the “apartment” and the common room, a space equalling a little over a thousand square feet. So now what to do about displays? I visited many museums, to steal ideas and to get a feel for what we could do. I did a lot of research on the types of museums and found that there were many “under glass” museums, a non-tactile, untouchable, look-only approach. Most museums for the blind are this way. I found out there are only a handful of truly accessible museums in the entire world. Our goal is to develop additional displays to make the TSBVI museum more accessible by including features like a listening station, self-guided tours, computer kiosks, etc. But we had to start somewhere.

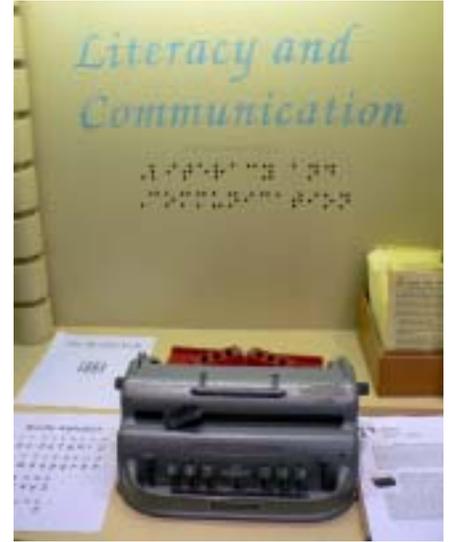
So that was the first problem. How do I make the museum accessible without the public destroying the artifacts that we have? I asked Teresa, our receptionist who is blind, if putting Braille on the wall was the way to go. She told me that it is hard to read with the fingers, and if there are many people in the museum who are blind, it would create somewhat of a traffic jam. So what did I do? I put in floor cues. If a cane touched the square on the floor, the holder of the cane will know to feel for something on the wall at that point. This item is a small square that defines which wall they are touching. Then, I have the materials corresponding to each of the walls in a notebook.



A copy of Helen Keller's handwriting in the archives of the TSBVI Learning Resources Center.

But there are still many items to touch and to experience that speak for themselves: An old school bell from before the electronic system came along, six different Braillewriters, trophies of old glory days, slate and stylus (including a nice New York Point one) and various other things that can be picked up and felt. For sighted kids and adults, I set up a Braille station with an explanation of what a Braille cell is as well as the alphabet with a loaded Perkins Braille. KC Dignan at the school has given me cards from NFB that have a saying on it in Braille that can be “decoded” with the alphabet right on the card. There will be other activities during “Museum Day” in Austin (September 10th) when many of the public museums are open for free or for a reduced price. The TSBVI museum is always free.

Dr. Hatlen’s Expanded Core Curriculum concepts were stenciled on the walls with a visual Braille display of them directly underneath (all uncontracted Braille) as well as the tactile Braille. Patti Robinson, our local artist who has designed a huge number of our summer school shirts at TSBVI, did the artistic part. Diane, our librarian, figured out a way to put dots on the wall. It has been a real collaborative effort, with many at the school jumping in and participating.



Perkins Braillewriter at an accessible learning center.



Boys at TSBVI making brooms.

We have history that extends back to a time when Austin only had about 1500 people – a history rich with board members right out of the days of the Texas Revolution, superintendents who were physicians and leaders in Texas History (one of which was the governor’s personal physician), and many other characters that started in Austin, but really were Texas heroes. Our heroes.

Many staff say “it’s about time!” because we lost a lot of our artifacts and historical items in the 1980s with a great purging; I bite my lip every time I hear, “Oh, we gave that away to the Salvation Army years ago”. Ouch. Most of the artifacts in the museum came from our campus somewhere and I know there are more things to discover, closets to explore. I found basket-weaving material in a classroom closet, an old watch in a box in an old bathroom-turned-storage room. Other items came to me through many of the generous folks on campus who were willing to donate them. What we have still tells a rich and valuable story not only for the employees here, but for Austinites and for the blindness community here and all over the world.



Girls at TSBVI weaving baskets.

The museum is open Saturdays from 10am until 2pm, at least for our sesquicentennial year, and hopefully we will find enough volunteers or student help to keep it open several hours during the week. If you have a large group who would like a guided tour, please call the school at 512-454-8631 and we’ll be more than happy to help you. Better yet, if you were a TSBVI student or employee who might have taken a “keepsake” home, what better time to return it during our *extended amnesty* period, which will continue for as long as the museum is open!

**A Tour of Braille Writers Through the Years
At the TSBVI museum with Holly Cooper**



Advertised as the “first successful braille writer” in Outlook for the Blind, the Hall Braille Typewriter was widely produced in the 1930’s and 1940’s.



The Andersson and Sorensen braille writer was made in Copenhagen, Denmark in the 1950’s



This braille writer was known as the Blista and made in the 1960’s in Germany.



This modern style braillewriter was made in Japan from 1962 to 1982 and was called the Lavender braille writer. Since it had many plastic parts, it was light weight and portable, but the plastic became brittle with age and parts broke easily.

En Español: Finding Help for Young Children

Email announcement from NICHCY’s eNews

Abstract: announcement of resources available in Spanish

Key Words: early intervention, disability, blindness, visual impairment, resources

Intervencion temprana: What is it? How to find it. NICHCY offers a Spanish version of *Finding Help for Young Children with Disabilities (Birth-5)*. Early intervention services are explained, as well as how to access them for infants and toddlers. This Spanish publication will also connect readers with many of the major organizations who can tell them more. Access the publication online at:

< <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/spanish/pa2stxt.htm> >.

In English: <<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/parent/pa2txt.htm>>.

Resources from the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities

By Pat Pound, Executive Director, Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities

Abstract: this article reviews the mission of the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities and provides links to obtain more information.

Key Words: Pat Pound, Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities, key laws.

In existence since 1949, the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities (GCPD) works toward a state where people with disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, and self-determination. The Governor appoints twelve members to serve on the Committee, seven of whom must be people with disabilities. Representatives from six state agencies serve as ex officio or advisory members. The Committee meets about four times per year.

The GCPD makes recommendations on disability issues to the Governor and Legislature; promotes compliance with disability-related laws; promotes a network of local communities/committees doing similar work; and recognizes employers and media for employing and positively depicting Texans with disabilities. Members work on issues related to access, communication, education, health, housing, recreation, transportation, and workforce. During each legislative session, staff tracks legislation in these issue areas. You can sign up to get e-mails about the bills being tracked during the session.

The GCPD does not provide direct services, but does provide an extensive website that answers many disability-related questions. Every year the GCPD produces a poster promoting employment of people with disabilities featuring artwork by a Texan with a disability. See the latest poster on our web page or click on “publications” to see past posters. The GCPD also has a DVD called *The Scoop on Reporting about People with Disabilities* that is useful in training journalism and communications students—and it works equally well as a disability sensitivity video or as a tool for youth to see role models with disabilities. Contact the Governor’s Committee if you would like a DVD.

If you would like to get involved with the Governor’s Committee you can contact the Governor’s Office, Appointments Division at <<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/appointments>>, or you can also be involved in one of our local (mayor or county) committees that do similar work. For local committee information please go to: <<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/disabilities/localcom>>. For more information, contact:

Pat Pound, Executive Director
Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities
PO Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711
512-463-5739 or Dial 711 for Relay Services

- For more information about the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities please visit our Web site at: <<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/disabilities>>.
- For a handy reference to laws important to Texans with disabilities see our “Key Laws” section covering areas such as building access, assistance animals, tax exemptions, parking, and many more at: <<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/disabilities/resources/keylaws>>.
- To read the GCPD’s current recommendations to the Governor and Legislature please go to: <<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/disabilities/publications/recommend>>.

EEOC Explains Employment Rights Of Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Press Release (Oct. 31, 2005) from Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Abstract: This press release announces publication of a document on the application of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to employees who are blind or visually-impaired.

Key Words: blind, visual impairment, employment, EEOC, ADA, discrimination, accommodations

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today issued a question-and-answer document on the application of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to people in the workplace who are blind or who have vision impairments. The new publication, is available on EEOC's web site at <<http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/blindness.html>> focuses on the ADA and specific disability issues in accordance with President Bush's New Freedom Initiative. It is the second ADA document made available by the Commission in the past two weeks, in observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

"This publication will help eliminate unfounded fears and stereotypes that lead to employment discrimination against so many people who are blind or visually impaired," said EEOC Chair Cari M. Dominguez. "As with prior ADA fact sheets, our goal is twofold: first, to make clear that all people with disabilities are protected from workplace discrimination and, second, to educate employers and promote access and inclusion."

Among the issues the new Q&A document addresses are:

- When a vision impairment is a "disability" within the meaning of the ADA;
- What questions employers may ask job applicants or employees about their vision impairments and when employers may conduct medical examinations that test vision;
- What accommodations people who are blind or visually disabled may need to apply for a job, to perform a job's essential functions, or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment, such as the ability to take advantage of training and other opportunities for advancement; and
- How employers should handle safety concerns they may have about applicants or employees with vision impairments.

The fact sheet helps to advance the goals of the President's New Freedom Initiative, a comprehensive strategy for the full integration of people with disabilities into all aspects of American life. The New Freedom Initiative seeks to promote greater access to technology, education, employment opportunities, and community life for people with disabilities.

Contact: Charles Robbins, David Grinberg
(202) 663-4900
TTY: (202) 663-4494

CHARGE Syndrome Parent Manual

CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, Inc. (Information release provided via email by Neal Stanger, President CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, Inc., Hastings on Hudson, NY.)

Abstract: information on how to obtain the CHARGE Syndrome parent manual

Key Words: CHARGE syndrome, CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, parent manual

“CHARGE Syndrome, a management manual for parents, version 2.1” is available as a free resource online through the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation website. It is broken it down into over 30 chapters that can be downloaded separately, or the entire 269 pages can be downloaded as one file. Please feel free to use this resource and to share with others, whether online or by burning onto cd’s for them. You can view the CHARGE manual index at <www.chargesyndrome.org/resources-manual.asp>, or you can follow the links from our home page at <<http://www.chargesyndrome.org/>>.

Volunteers Needed for CHARGE Retreat

By Kathy Springer, Parent Leadership Participant, Round Rock, TX

Abstract: A parent leader is organizing an event for Charge Syndrome families, and need volunteers.

Key Words: News & Views, CHARGE Syndrome, retreat, families, volunteer opportunities

Texas Charger’s is a group of Texas families, friends, and professionals who are dedicated to helping children and young adults who live with CHARGE Syndrome <www.chargesyndrome.org>. CHARGE Syndrome is one of the leading causes, and the most commonly identified syndrome causing deafblindness in the state of Texas. The Texas Deafblind Census in 1993 accounted for only 12 deafblind children with CHARGE Syndrome. Now in 2006 it showed 64, and increase of 433%! The word “CHARGE” comes from the first letter of some of the most common features seen in this syndrome. C – Coloboma or Cranial nerve abnormalities; H – Heart malformations; A – Atresia of the choanae; R – Retardation of growth and /or development; G – Genital or urinary abnormalities; E – Ear abnormalities, hearing loss. These children have several medical complications and spend a significant time in and out of hospitals.

The families are faced with not only the overwhelming task of caring for these children, but also with the expense of medical bills. Texas Chargers is planning a stress free day for the families to connect with others and share the joys and challenges of raising someone with special needs. This retreat will include information for families; carnival activities such as train rides, face painting, cotton candy etc.; and a trip to the swimming pool or movie theater/arcade. Lunch will be provided.

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED

When: October 7th 2006 8am-5pm.

Where: Peaceable Kingdom Retreat, Killeen Texas <www.peaceablekingdomretreat.org>.

Why: To Help Charge Syndrome Children & their families have a day of support.

Volunteer Opportunities: Nursing care, day care, one-on-one w/ Charger, sign interpreter, Spanish interpreter, volunteer for various carnival activities, photography.

We are dedicated to helping give the Texas Charger’s a better quality of life. Please contact Cathy Springer at <dacspringer@austin.rr.com> or 512-255-3176 to sign up!

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Mail or email your new classified to Karen Brown:
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756 or <karenbrown@tsbvi.edu>
An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar
is posted at <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm>>



“DBMAT IS DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS”

34th Annual Family Conference
~ October 13 –15, 2006 ~
Camp John Marc, Near Meridian, TX

This learning weekend is for adult family members and service providers. Because DBMAT wants both parents and extended family members to attend and participate in the program sessions, we have made exceptional onsite childcare available for your children with disabilities and their siblings. Children have their own planned fun activities separate from the adult learning sessions and activities.

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

Come prepared to learn, participate, have fun, make friends and enjoy.

Conference contact numbers are:

Cyndi: 281-821-9005
Positive Connections Line: 432-264-6780

1st Texas CHARGERS Retreat

October 7th 2006

Peaceable Kingdom Retreat <peaceablekingdomretreat.org> , Killeen, Texas.

Hurry, hurry, hurry and sign up!

We already have 20 families coming so you won't want to miss out. We want to encourage all children with Charge Syndrome to attend with their families. This retreat will provide a stress free day for families to come out and connect with others. The day will start with information about support offered in Texas and include carnival activities, train rides and lunch. Then we will have break out sessions on different therapies and the kids will be able to pick from swimming or a movie theater and arcade.

If you would like to receive a registration package or be on the membership list please contact:

Cathy Springer at <dacspringer@austin.rr.com> or 512-255-3176.

You won't want to miss all the fun so make sure you mark your calendars!

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Through Your Child's Eyes

A workshop for parents of children with visual impairments sponsored by:
Region XI Education Service Center
DARS Division for Blind Services
TSBVI Outreach

September 22 – 24, 2006

Fort Worth, TX

Radisson Inn Fort Worth, South
100 Alta Mesa East Boulevard

For information contact:

Olga Uriegas, Region XI ESC, 817-740-7567
or Jennifer Brinegar, DBS, 817-759-3500

8th Annual Virginia Murray Sowell Distinguished Lecture:

**Orientation and Mobility for Travelers
Who Use Ambulatory Aids**

**Sandra Rosen,
San Francisco State University**

**September 30, 2006
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX**

Contact: Anita Page or Angela Gonzalez at
(806) 742-1997 x233

BART Training

Bonding and Relaxation Techniques

September 12 and 13 – Region 4 ESC, Houston
contact: Karen Crone <kcrone@esc4.net>

October 12 & 13 – Region 8 ESC, Mt. Pleasant
contact: Dawn Adams <dadams@reg8.net>

October 18 & 19 – Region 13 ESC, Austin
contact: Debra Leff <debra.leff@esc13.txed.net>

November 2 & 3 – Region 14 ESC, Abilene
contact: Linda Laughlin <lilaughlin@esc14.net>

TSBVI Sesquicentennial Event

IN TOUCH WITH KNOWLEDGE:

The Educational History of Blind People

is a traveling exhibit from the Marie and Eugene Callahan Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind. This exhibit draws on the Callahan Museum's unique collection and extensive research on the history of the education of blind people.

On the TSBVI Campus in Austin during
August and September, 2006
Dorm K (Building 508).

Open Monday-Friday 9-11 AM & 1-3 PM;
Weekends 10 AM – 2 PM.

Call (512) 454-8631 or email Gloria Bennett
<GloriaBennett@tsbvi.edu> to reserve a
visiting time or request teaching materials.

8th Annual Sports Extravaganza for Blind & Visually Impaired Students

When: October 20 – Goalball Tournament
(5:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.)
October 21 – Individual Events
(8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)

Where: Irving High School & Bowie Middle
School, Irving, Texas (Friday)
Nimitz High School, Irving, Texas (Saturday)

Who: Students with visual impairments, ages 0-22

Cost: No entry fees, but families must pay for their
own transportation and lodging if needed.
(Some financial assistance may be available from
your local Lions Club. Please call for more details.)

Contact Christy Householter at 972-348-1634
<christy.householter@region10.org>,
or visit our web site:
www2.ednet10.net/ssvi/Sports_Extravaganza.htm

2007 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness

Omni Hotel Southpark
Austin, TX

Feb. 16-17, 2007

Sessions from Texas families, educators, and related professionals,
as well as national leaders in fields associated with deafblindness.

Look for more details and registration materials this fall!

TSBVI On-Campus Workshops

For more information, contact: Karen Brown at (512) 206-9314

Tech Assessments

Presenters: Patrick Van Geem and Sharon Nichols
September 29, 2006
9 AM – 4 PM

Hands-On: Teaching Daily Living Skills

TSBVI Outreach and Comprehensive Skills Staff
December 9, 2006
9 AM-4 PM

Technology and the Reader with Low Vision

Sharon Nichols, Ann Rash, and Patrick Van Geem
October 27, 2006
9 AM-4 PM

Preparing Students for Math Tactile Graphics on the TEKS

TSBVI Outreach Staff
January 26, 2007

Introduction to Duxbury Braille Translation Software

Kathy Norwood, Dotmaker Associates
November 17 and 18, 2006
9 AM – 4 PM (both days)
Registration for this session is limited
and is on a first-come, first-served basis.

High Tech Math: Using Scientific Notebook with Duxbury to Produce Nemeth Code and an Introduction to the Accessible Graphing Calculator

Susan Osterhaus
January 27, 2007
9 AM – 4 PM

Training from TSBVI Broadcast on TETN

For more information, contact your Regional Education Service Center

Tips for Collaboration and Consultation

Event # 18624

TSBVI Outreach Staff and Invited Others
September 20, 2006
1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Intervener Team Training:

Improving Interactions

Event # 18626

November 8th, 2006
2:30 PM – 4:30 PM

Infused Skills Assessment

Event # 18625

Lynn McAllister & TSBVI Outreach
October 11, 2006
1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Struggling Readers Successes

Event # 18627

Ann Rash, TSBVI Outreach and Invited Others
November 15, 2006
1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

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SEE/HEAR

Published quarterly: February, May, August, and November
Available in Spanish and English on TSBVI's website at
<www.tsbvi.edu>

Contributions to the newsletter can be mailed to
TSBVI Outreach
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Austin, Texas 78756
or emailed to section editors.

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

Deadlines for Submitting Articles
December 1st for the Winter edition
March 1st for the Spring edition
June 1st for the Summer edition
September 1st for the Fall edition

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

This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education. The Outreach Programs are funded in part by IDEA-B Formula, and IDEA-D Deaf-Blind Federal grants. Federal funds are administered through the Texas Education Agency, Division of Special Education, to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.



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