

# TX SenseAbilities

A Quarterly Publication about Visual Impairments and Deafblindness for Families and Professionals

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Students participated in "Austin City Limits" at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired this spring. Teenagers from across the state came to this special short program and learned about becoming a professional musician. Students had opportunities to visit recording studios, speak to professionals, and perform.

## Growing Up with Oli

By Shannon Gardner, Parent, Round Rock

Abstract: The author shares about her son's relationship with his younger sister who is blind. Read more about her family on her blog, *Sweet Oliana* at <http://www.sweetoliana.blogspot.com/>.

Key words: Family Wisdom, blindness, autism, sibling issues

I have often wondered what it is like to be a sibling of a child with a disability. I know it's an adjustment for any child when a new baby is brought into the house, but what about the child whose life is forever changed beyond just having another little person to live with?

There is so much more to deal with than parents being more preoccupied with feeding routines, frequent diaper changes and crying episodes. And it's more than just knowing that you now have to share mommy and daddy's attention with a new sister when, well let's face it, you probably weren't all that thrilled about her joining you. Especially since you were an only child up until now.



*Oli and her brother Kekoa play together on the floor*

Your life changes because now life is riding in the car for hours and then sitting in little rooms with crappy toys and being told to "be quiet" while you try to wait patiently. It's waiting in these rooms several times a week when all you really want to do is go back home and play with your toys and watch the *Cars* movie... again. It's sensing the atmosphere change in your house and feeling the weight of a sadness that you don't understand, but seems to have followed your sister home from the

hospital. The weight that seems to intensify after waiting in another one of those little rooms.

As you get older you start to notice that your sister, who you have waited to play with since she was born, never seems to get old enough to play like you. She doesn't sit up very well when she does learn to sit up and then she can't see when you try to show her your newest Lightning McQueen car or your new Hot Wheels race track.

Mommy tells you to put your toys in her hands to show her things, but frankly this doesn't make sense either because then she only puts your new toy in her mouth and ruins it with slobber. She never learns to move around the house which means Mommy has to carry her everywhere. The words "Oli just needs more help" are lost on you when you just want to be picked up and carried around like before.

You love your sister, but just don't understand her. You ask questions and want to know why she is so different than you, but Mommy's explanations that God made her different don't make sense. Why can't the doctors just make her better? She is obviously sick and this is what doctors do. Why doesn't she ever get any better? Why do they keep taking her to the doctor if they don't fix her?

As you grow and change, learn your letters, learn to count and tie your shoes you try to show your sister so she can learn, too. But your attempts are to no avail and she doesn't seem to get it. She won't talk to you and now you are drifting farther and farther apart. She starts to do strange things like flap her arms, hum loudly and shake her head. You try to play like her to connect with her in some way, but what seems to amuse her is just boring to you.

You never give up though. You never give up trying to form that connection with her.

She is your sister despite your differences. Mommy and Daddy have always taught you to love her and help her and that is exactly what you do. Not so much out of a feeling of obligation, but because that is just who you are.

Kekoa, you are such a special little boy. I love that you just love her and even though it's been five years since everything in your life changed, it has never dampened your spirit or your love of your family and life. Please keep your kind heart and don't pay any attention to people who may try to lead you down a different path.

You, my son, are going to change the world.

# Five Steps to Getting an iPad Covered by Insurance: A mom's story of success

By Dawn Sconfienza Gaita

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**Abstract:** The author shares strategies she learned through personal experience in requesting insurance companies pay for iPads for children with special needs.

**Keywords:** Family wisdom, special needs, technology, insurance benefits

As a parent of a child with special needs, I understand firsthand the financial struggles that come with the job. When I discovered the iPad and the benefits it could have for my son, it became my mission to find a way to provide one for him. This is a simplified version of the steps I took in getting my iPad covered by insurance, and it is my hope that others can benefit from this information.

1. Check your medical benefits for your "Durable Medical Coverage." (Mine covered 50%, but since we had already met our out-of-pocket max, they covered at 100%)
2. Phone your insurance company and ask, "Please assign me to a case manager that is experienced with special needs children."
3. After you are provided a case manager, explain that you need the iPad as an augmentative communication device **INCLUDING** the Proloquo2go App (or TouchChat, OneVoice, TapToTalk, etc.) Provide comparison costs to a more expensive system such as the Dynavox, and remind them that you are opting for a more cost-effective device. Focus on Proloquo2go (or your chosen augmentative communication app) and that it is being introduced by speech therapists and occupational therapists in public schools for special needs kids, as well as in private therapy... say nothing negative at all. If they have never heard of the Proloquo2go program, ask for their email address to send them a link and encourage them to visit the Proloquo2go website. You could also provide links to the Youtube demonstrations provided by Proloquo2go (or app demos provided on [a4cwsn.com](http://a4cwsn.com)). Be sure to ask the case manager for all the necessary approval codes and coverage information so you are aware and comfortable with any out-of-pocket expenses you may incur. They may tell you "no" at this point. If they do, ask them to email or fax you a letter of denial immediately. Local developmental disability divisions or boards and many private funding organizations will require a medical insurance denial to apply for funds, so getting this letter can be very helpful. Don't get discouraged, there are still more ways to get funding!
4. Find supporting documentation and case studies to include with your claim. Google articles on "iPads for children with special needs" or "benefits for children with [your child's specific

condition] and iPads," etc.

5. Copy your most recent speech evaluation and IEP if it indicates anything helpful. And, have every doctor, therapist, school personnel or anyone else write a letter supporting your child's need for an "Augmentative Communication device such as the iPad with Proloquo2go."

The more information you can provide, the less likely they will argue against the need. My personal insurance required that I pay for the device and then submit a claim form for reimbursement.

### **When submitting your Request for Approval**

Include a cover letter explaining what you would like to purchase and why. Explain how it will be used and what benefits it would provide your child.

Supporting Documents from Google, etc.

Letters from Doctors, Speech Therapists, etc. expressing "Medical Necessity"

Receipt of the Device and the AugCom App

### **When submitting your Claim for Reimbursement**

Include a cover letter explaining:

- What you purchased
- What it was for
- How it should be coded
- That it should be treated as an IN NETWORK provider.

Include in the notes names and dates and times of phone calls from your conversation with your case manager. Also include supporting documents from your research, letters from doctors, speech therapists, and other qualified professionals, receipt of the device and the augmentative communication app.

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### **Sample letters of recommendation for providers**

#### **SAMPLE SCHOOL SPEECH THERAPIST RECOMMENDATION LETTER**

To Whom It May Concern:

Date

This letter is regarding (NAME)'s needs regarding augmentative alternative communication (AAC). (NAME) is a \_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_ month old (boy/girl) and has a diagnosis of (DIAGNOSIS THAT IS COVERED BY INSURANCE). (He/She) is severely speech impaired, specifically with very limited speech which is mostly non-intelligible. (He/She) benefits from a model to vocalize and use signs. (NAME) uses a multi-modal approach to communication; using single gestures, signs, picture symbols, and vocalizations.

## SAMPLE PERSONAL INFORMATION:

(NAME) is currently using a communication book with digital photos and picture symbols throughout the day. This low tech augmentative system is functional in certain situations, but does not currently meet (NAME)'s educational, social, and emotional needs. The communication book is limited in the vocabulary that (NAME) is able to communicate. In addition, static picture boards do not provide voice output. The majority of (NAME)'s daily functional communication needs cannot be met with natural speech and/or low tech communication devices. (NAME) uses sign language, but the majority of people (he/she) comes into contact with do not understand the signs or know sign language in general. Therefore, (he/she) requires a speech generating device to maintain functional communication ability.

(NAME) has demonstrated skills that make (him/her) a good candidate to use an AAC system. When presented with line drawing picture symbols on a single page, (NAME) is able to identify pictures from a field of 4 to 8 pictures. (He/She) is able to use (his/her) middle finger or pointer finger to access the pictures. (NAME) is able to identify simple categories (e.g., food/drink, play, go), a skill needed to use an AAC system with dynamic display. (NAME) is also highly motivated to hear the voice when (he/she) pushes each button.

(NAME) has been trialing the Apple iPad with the communication software program (Proloquo2go) since (START DATE OF TRIAL PERIOD). The iPad is currently used in the classroom with all students. (NAME) has been using the device during speech sessions to identify friends and make requests. (NAME) is highly motivated to listen to the voice output and explore the device.

At this time, (NAME)'s receptive language skills are superior to (his/her) expressive language skills. Based on (NAME)'s skills, it was determined that (NAME) requires a communication system that:

- Allows for voice output as an expressive means to communicate wants and needs.
- Provides a prompt or model to imitate/verbalize.
- Uses dynamic displays that match functional and meaningful activities/situations.
- Allows for sentence building to expand sentences.
- Allows for vocabulary growth.
- Is relatively lightweight so that (NAME) can independently carry the device in a variety of settings

Signature

Full Name, affiliations, school and contact Information

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## SAMPLE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FOR IPAD – PHYSICIAN/MEDICAL NECESSITY

Date

Re: (name)

D.O.B

ID #

Dear Ms/Mr.(CASE MANAGER):

I am writing to request authorization for payment for an augmentative/alternative electronic communication system (AAC) for (NAME). (NAME) has (DIAGNOSIS) and (ALTERNATE DIAGNOSIS – Multiple), resulting in severe delays with (his/her) expressive language. (NAME) completed (\_\_) years of schooling in the public school system. (His/Her) inability to communicate affected (his/her) ability to reach (his/her) true potential. (a few individual specific sentences about the current educational and speech support he/she is receiving). Both at school and in private speech therapy (NAME) is using a simple iPad with the (name of app) It is an AAC program and is installed by the manufacturer. I understand many public schools also use the same device and program, and it is quickly becoming the industry standard. The program is user friendly and (NAME) is doing very well in trials at school and therapy. It is quickly replacing the larger, bulkier communication boards among professionals. Not only will using such a device and program benefit (him/her) speech wise, it will also have wonderful fine motor skill development benefits.

SAMPLE OF SPECIFIC SUPPORTING DETAILS:

(NAME) has good receptive language and is able to follow simple instructions. As (he/she) continues to become more independent it is becoming frustrating for (him/her) to not be able to express himself. This will eventually affect (his/her) social development thus creating a whole new set of concerns. This device is medically necessary in order for (NAME) to be able to indicate (his/her) physical and health status (such as giving details about feelings when ill or in pain), letting others know of (his/her) personal needs and wants, and to request help (especially in emergency situations when (NAME) is at school or with caregivers who may not be familiar with (NAME)'s poor and limited speech).

The iPad with the Proloquo2go program should definitely qualify as medical equipment as it is a speech generating device It is directly related to (NAME)'s diagnosis and current therapy program; replaces the abnormal functioning of a body function (verbal speech); is expected to be used for a long-term and will grow with (him/her); and, it is appropriate to improve (NAME)'s current and future language to assist in activities of daily living both at home and at school. It would certainly be more cost effective and age appropriate than the more complicated Dynavox systems currently available.

Thank you for assistance in making this device available to (NAME) and his family and helping to improve (his/her) health care and functional abilities and independence. Please call me at (PHONE) if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

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## SAMPLE LETTER OF IPAD RECOMMENDATION FROM PRIVATE SPEECH THERAPIST

Date

Re: (NAME)

AAC device – iPad Proloquo2go

To Whom It May Concern:

As (NAME)'s private speech pathologist I have evaluated and worked with (NAME) over the past (LENGTH OF SERVICE). I use my iPad with (him/her) regularly and have purchased the Proloquo2go program for my device as a generic adjustment program for (him/her) before (he/she) received (his/her) own. (He/she) has demonstrated exciting interest in the use of the iPad as a communication device and has excelled in using it as both a therapy task device and as a way to communicate (his/her) wants and needs for general communication. For a child with severe verbal apraxia, this communication ability has made (him/her) less frustrated with life decisions and more able to comply with adult directives.

(NAME) has good receptive language and is able to follow single-step and at times 2-step instructions. As (he/she) continues to become more independent, it is becoming frustrating for (him/her) to not be able to express (him/her-self). This will eventually affect social development thus creating a whole new set of concerns. This device is medically necessary in order for (NAME) to be able to indicate physical and health status (such as giving details about feelings when ill or in pain), letting others know of personal needs and wants, and to request help (especially in emergency situations when (NAME) is at school or with caregivers who may not be familiar with (NAME)'s poor and limited speech).

The iPad with the (name of app) program should definitely qualify as medical equipment as it is a speech generating device which is directly related to (NAME)'s diagnosis and current therapy program; replaces the abnormal functioning of a body function (verbal speech); is expected to be used for a long-term and will grow with (him/her); and, it is essential to improve (NAME)'s current and future language to assist (him/her) in (his/her) activities of daily living both at home and at school. It would certainly be more cost effective and age appropriate than the more complicated Dynavox systems currently available.

(NAME)'s use of the iPad will continue to be a life long process. Initially it will be as much a learning experience as a communication tool since all programs have a learning curve inherent to them. I believe that (NAME) will be able to use the iPad and Proloquo2go program with success and therefore should be accepted as a necessary medical device for (his/her) health and well-being.

Sincerely,

## Madie's Ski Trip

By Alison Brown, parent of Madie and Jean Robinson, Outreach Family Specialist

**Abstract:** Students with visual impairments participated in the New England Blind & Visually Impaired Ski Festival. Other activities included snowmobiling and tubing.

**Key words:** family wisdom, New England Blind & Visually Impaired Ski Festival, NEVI Fest, adaptive sports

In February 2013, four students and two instructors from TSBVI participated in the New England Visually Impaired and Blind (NEVI) Ski Festival held at the Sugarloaf Mountain Resort in Maine. NEVI Fest provides the opportunity for skiers with visual impairments, their guides and families to meet, learn new skills, and share experiences, through skiing. This festival is designed to create a unique social, recreational and educational experience for skiers of all levels.

The trip began with an airline flight from Austin, Texas to Portland, Maine and there the students and their teachers took a bus to Sugar Loaf Mountain Resort. None of the students had ever skied before and they were both excited and scared to try something new. The next morning they joined about 30 other students from Florida, Puerto Rico and Sudan and were fitted with boots, skis and helmets. Dressed in warm clothes, gloves, hats and neon yellow ski vests, they met their ski guides. Over 70 volunteers are trained to guide and assist the students so they could experience skiing at whatever level they were able.



Madie tethered to ski guide.

Each student had three guides. Two of the guides stood on either side of their student. The guides held a long pole between them and the student grabbed in the middle of the pole. The third guide skied behind the student holding onto a harness that attached like a vest around the student's chest. The student was able to get directional information just by a tug on the reins.



Madie holding onto pole with her ski guides

Madie laughed when she told how her guide told her to “giddy up” just like she was a horse! After a day of falls, their sore bodies were ready to be soothed in the hot tub. Sitting in an inner tube, riding down snow trails was much easier than navigating the mountain and ski lifts. One night a group rode up the mountain in a huge SnowCat that is used to groom the slopes. Another treat was snowmobiling and being pulled in a sled.

No ski trip would be complete without flopping down in the snow and making snow angels. Madie discovered that she could use her cane tip to braille her name in the snow!



Mom and daughter making snow angels.

Alison reported that as a tag-along mom and de facto photographer, she was thrilled to be able to watch these students try something so completely new and different. Each to their own abilities learned to ski and get more proficient and faster. She reported two or three of the TSBVI students got medals in an event in which not everyone medals. Madison was told she will get the silver in the pole and tether division. Amy was off-tether and medaled as well. This is a testament to the fantastic guides they all had. She was impressed with how well the students generally behaved and

participated. In particular, Joseph did a fantastic job of clearly expressing his gratitude for getting to participate in this event.



Mom catches a ride on the back of the sled pulling Madi.

The NEVI Fest organization did a great job of organizing the event, making sure everyone had everything they needed, providing some food and refreshments, securing a great location and facility for the event, and providing excellent guides. Madison's guides were really good with her, accommodating her emotional needs and very encouraging. They helped her work out her fears and kept her safe on the slopes and lifts. This is the type of experience that parents of blind and visually impaired students most often cannot provide for their children due to the expense, lack of training and time away from jobs and other family. I was fortunate to be able to tagalong and watch, but I could not have taken my family on this sort of trip and certainly don't have the skill to guide her. Even though I drove through a blizzard to get there and did not ski, I got so much joy out of watching Madison and the other students enjoy their experiences.



Madie wearing her ski medal

## Work: Making a Contribution

Rosemary Alexander, Ph.D., TxP2P

Keywords: Family Wisdom, disability, self-determination, employment, vocational skills

Abstract: The author shares practical strategies families can use to support their young adult in being successful in the world of work.

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A common fear for parents as their child with disabilities grows up is that he or she will sit at home all day after graduation and do nothing. They wonder, how do I assist my child to have a full, meaningful day? A primary answer for these concerns is WORK!

From *A Good Life*, by Al Etmanski, comes the idea that everyone must work, no matter the disability. Work in this book is defined as making a contribution, and everyone deserves the opportunity to make a contribution to his or her community, to use his talents and follow her passion. Work has many benefits as well: work gives meaning to our lives, provides a routine, a schedule, a reason to get up and get going every day, connects us with people, makes us feel useful, and possibly earns money!

These beliefs about work mean that we must consider our children's gifts and then find a place where they can use those gifts. This perspective leads to a new way of thinking about our children: instead of seeing disabilities, we must now look for abilities. Focusing on their abilities and interests will be the first step in building work opportunities for our children.

Another important key is expanding our view of work. We usually think of work as the 8-5 job we've been doing for years, but that model may not work for your child. We will expand the concept of work to include volunteering, working part-time, and entrepreneurship or self-employment; a person's work might be 40 hours a week or one hour a week, or somewhere in between. Remember, our definition of work is making a contribution, and all of these forms of work fit that definition.

I hope that so far, I've convinced you to consider work as an important part of your child's life as he or she grows up. But how do you get started? What can help your child learn about work and find the right path? To get started we must give them work experience and call on all our resources, at home and school, to create work opportunities.

### **Encourage your child to gain work experience at home and in the neighborhood**

Look for tasks around the house and neighborhood your child might be able to do and encourage him or her to do them regularly, tasks such as yard work, pet care, picking up mail and papers while the neighbors are out of town, watering plants, babysitting, running errands, anything that promotes your

child's sense that work is important and gives him work experience. It's important to keep a log, see what your child can do, what help is needed, what makes him or her happy and engaged.

What services can your child provide that are in demand? Look around at your elder neighbors: they may need someone to watch TV with or teach them how to use their electronic gadgets, run errands or cook some meals for them. Likewise your busiest neighbors may be eager to pay someone to walk the dog, water the plants, run to the grocery store, and so on.

### **Use school to gain work skills and experience**

Push your child's school to help with the "everyone can work" project. Some of the ways that school can help your child gain work skills and experience are:

- Classes to develop work skills, resume writing, good work habits, and other skills
- Internships to gain work experience (usually un-paid), first on campus and then off campus (Community-Based Vocational Instruction or CBVI)
- Off-campus paid work in the last year or so of school. A school VAC (Vocational Adjustment Counselor) or a supported employment coach can help your child find a job and provide job coaching as your child learns to do a job.

Ask school staff to sit down with you and your child (not at an ARD!) to brain-storm about work options for your child. Some of the ideas might be translated into IEP goals. Here are some questions to ask at a brain-storming meeting:

### **Find a supportive work environment.**

- Look for a place for your child to gain work experience or to find a job where people care for others and have heart for their work.
- Consider schools, churches, a seminary, or a non-profit or agency that supports people with disabilities,
- Look for a place that is already diverse. Notice the grocery stores, hardware stores, pharmacies where people with disabilities already work. Their presence shows a willingness to hire and to adapt the work-place to suit the person. Sometimes, instead of a small caring place, you might find opportunities at a state agency or a big company that has a hiring requirement or policy to promote work for people with disabilities.
- Consider self-employment. Self-employment can be more flexible and creative and truly promote work geared to your child's energy level, interests and abilities.

### **Develop a group to help with the job search**

- One way to keep the job search effort going is to create an employment network or support group to help carry out your child's job quest. It could be made up of school staff, friends, family, neighbors, and people whose job is to assist your child.
- Do you know other parents who would like to team up to create a work collaborative? Perhaps a group could advertise together to provide yard work, computer repair, errand running, set up

for parties or church events. The group might make it easier on each parent and also provide supports and companionship for the group of workers.

- Who in the brain-storming group has community connections that can help your child get started with a job or pursue an interest? Who can help build a website to advertise your child's business, help with business cards, etc.?

### **Find long-term supports to keep your child working.**

Once your child has established a job, whether self-employed or at a work site, he or she may need short-term job coaching or long-term supports. The first place to turn after graduation is DARS (Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services) for assistance with finding a job, providing on-site job coaching and paying for equipment and learning opportunities related to getting and keeping a job. DARS services will be fairly short-term but can be accessed again if your child loses his or her job. To learn more about DARS services, ask your child's school staff or check the website: <http://www.dars.state.tx.us/drs/vr.shtml>

Medicaid Waiver Programs and services for Intellectual Disabilities may provide job development and job coaching services. Ask your service provider about assistance to find and keep a job. See <http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/listofservices.html#physical>

If your child is working and getting paid yet wants to maintain eligibility for public funding (SSI, Medicaid, etc), PASS plans can be set up to allow your child to save money for a work-related one time expense, for example post-secondary education, equipment or a van, or long-term supports. (see <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-plans-self-support.htm>)

It may sound overwhelming to plan for work opportunities for your child, but keep in mind that work is the one thing after graduation that will make a difference every day. It can give your child focus, relationships, a positive way to spend the day, a sense of achievement, a purpose. It can encourage growth and learning after school ends. It opens doors and provides a way for your child to express himself, follow her passion, make a contribution. What could be more important?

*A Good Life*, written by Al Etmanski, comes out of a Vancouver parent organization, PLAN. See their website at: [www.plan.ca](http://www.plan.ca)

## TAPVI Talks

Jean Robinson, TSBVI Outreach, TAPVI Advisor

**Abstract:** The Texas Association for Parents of Children with Blindness and Visual Impairments (TAPVI) updates news about their organization.

**Keywords:** family wisdom, parenting, support group, visually impaired, TAPVI

Members of the Texas Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) volunteered at the Braille Challenge event at the Region 1 Education Service Center in Edinburg, Texas. This event is an academic competition designed to motivate blind students to study braille. Competitors are graded on braille speed and accuracy, braille spelling, chart and graph reading, proofreading and reading comprehension according to their age group. Winners of the regional contests go to Los Angeles to compete in the National Braille Challenge.

Three of the board members and two students presented a session at TAER in Dallas entitled “Look what we CAN do!” A panel of parents and young adults with visual impairments talked about their accomplishments in school and in the community. They shared what they have learned from their experiences and what supports they need in order to be successful. They have a wide variety of interests and community involvement.

One student, Madie, started out participating in fun runs, then 5 K events and now half-marathons. These are community events not specifically designed for people with disabilities. Due to some physical limitations she has had extended family members walk along with her. However this year the race coordinator was told in advance what Madie needed to participate and he found the volunteers to run alongside her. There was a volunteer for each mile encouraging Madie along the way.

Daniel, a college student, lost his vision at age 11 from a four-wheeler accident. He bravely talked about the adjustment of not only losing his vision but losing many of his friends. With encouragement from his family and the dedication of his teacher of the visually impaired he made many gains.

This group is passionate about telling family members, professionals and students how to get involved in recreational activities in their community and how it builds their confidence and gives them new opportunities. Please contact one of the board members if you are interested in hearing their stories and want to help more students build life-long skills.

Our new website is in the last stages of development. We are in the process of changing the site name to be tapvi.com. Until then continue to use <http://www.familyconnect.org/TAPVI> and stay tuned. Join the TX VI Family listserv: [www.topica.com/lists/txvifamily](http://www.topica.com/lists/txvifamily)

Join us on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/>

# Cooking Tips for People Who are Visually Impaired

Kristy Sikes, home economics teacher, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: Strategies for cooking for people who are blind or visually impaired

Keywords: cooking, measuring, blind, visually impaired

Reprinted from Cooking Tips, a book written for teachers and students to help people with visual impairment learn to cook.

I have had the pleasure of being a home economics teacher and teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI) at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired since 1984. During this time, I have learned many techniques from my students. It is my hope that you will find this information helpful with your students or for yourself. Know that these ideas are meant to be used as a tool and may have to be altered depending on the need of the individual.

## How to Measure Ingredients

Measuring over a tray or dinner plate will reduce the amount of clean up due to leveling off excess ingredients and spillage. Measuring over the sink is also an option. Use graduated cups and spoons with handles. Always level off dry ingredients with a spatula, knife edge, or finger.

### **Butter or margarine:**

Use sticks which equal  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup.

1 Tbsp. equals about 1/2 inch, which is the width of most knife blades. Lay the blade on the top of the butter, lining up with the end of the stick, then roll the knife-edge to a cutting position and cut through.

### **Eggs:**

When cracking eggs, tap broad side of egg on a flat surface to form a large indentation. Then insert both thumbs and pull apart into a separate cup or bowl to check for shells, then put into mixture.

### **Flour or dry ingredients:**

If the recipe calls for sifting, measure after sifting. Lift lightly into measuring cup. Do not shake or tap the flour down.

### **Grated or chopped items:**

Pack cheese, dried fruit, nuts, or coconut lightly into measuring cup.

### **Liquid flavorings or extracts:**

Pour liquid into a large mouth bowl or cup. Bend handle of a metal measuring spoon creating a dipper or ladle. Lower the bent spoon into the bowl and lift out.

### **Liquids:**

Hold the cup by the handle extending thumb or index finger over the edge. When liquid reaches thumb or finger, the cup is full. Store oil in the refrigerator so it will be easier to measure. Oil is difficult to feel at room temperature.

### **Powdered spices and leavening agents:**

Stir the container a little to break up any lumps. Dip measuring spoon into container. Bring up full and

level. It is best to put leavening agents through a sieve to make sure all lumps are removed before adding it to mixture.

**Shortening and peanut butter:**

Rinse cup with water but do not dry the inside. This will make it easier to remove. Pack into measuring cup to eliminate air pocket.

**Brown sugar:**

Pack down firmly into cup to the top. Shake out into container. If you packed it correctly, it will stay in the shape of the cup without crumbling apart.

**Confectioners' or powdered sugar:**

Press through sifter or sieve to remove lumps. Scoop into cup and level off.

**Granulated sugar:**

Scoop into measuring equipment and level off. Accurate measuring contributes to the best results in cooking.



*Cooking utensils*

**Pouring Beverages**

This method is for pouring non-carbonated and non-frozen beverages.

**DO NOT PUT YOUR FINGER IN YOUR GLASS!**

Cues to use when pouring:

- Sound - the sound gets softer as the glass is filling (excessive noise will eliminate this as a cue)
- Weight - the glass gets heavier, but you have to hold the glass in your hand NOT set it on the counter or tabletop. (setting the glass on the counter will eliminate this cue)
- Temperature - if using a glass or plastic glass, the outside of the glass will feel cold if pouring a cold beverage and hot if pouring a hot beverage (styrofoam cups and liquids at room temperature eliminate this cue)

Working with a person skilled at pouring beverages, observe the process. Listen for the sound. Hold

the glass during or after the pouring so you can feel the weight and the temperature.

### **Steps:**

1. Position a "measuring tray" to catch spills.
2. Position the glass and beverage on the tray (the handle of the beverage container facing the dominant hand; the spout facing the less dominant hand which holds the glass).
3. Remove the lid of the container or turn the lid of the pitcher to the open position
4. Hold the glass in the non-dominant hand over the tray. Make sure that you spread your fingers slightly.
5. Lift the beverage container above the tray.
6. Bring the glass to the container to locate the spout.
7. Think about the cues. Begin pouring by tilting the beverage toward the glass.
8. When should you stop pouring?
  - when it starts to whisper,
  - when your middle finger starts to feel the change in temperature
  - when it feels heavier
  - when you hear a splashing sound hitting the tray!

Remember these steps, use these cues and you will have less clean up!

## **Cooking Resources**

### [Perkins Scout](http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/cooking-and-kitchen-safety/)

<http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/cooking-and-kitchen-safety/>

### [American Foundation for the Blind](http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=8&SectionID=115&TopicID=511&DocumentID=3256)

<http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=8&SectionID=115&TopicID=511&DocumentID=3256>

### [National Federation of the Blind: Future Reflections](https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr04/issue3/f040304.html)

<https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr04/issue3/f040304.html>

# **Volunteer Work: A Great Way to Learn Skills**

Eva Thompson-Lavigne, TSBVI Outreach Transition Specialist

**Abstract:** Volunteer work can be a great preparation for adult life, higher education and work. This article describes benefits and goals

**Keywords:** Volunteer, work experience, self-advocacy

Students with visual impairment (and in fact, all students) often don't know what to expect when they leave the public school setting. The public school setting is very different from the world they will enter whether college, community college, technical school, or work. Young people with visual impairment should know what skills they need and what is expected of them in order to be prepared when going to college or into a work environment. They need hands-on experience in practicing these skills.

There are significant differences between what public education is required to provide and what college, universities, and trade and vocational programs offer. There are different sets of supports and resources. After graduation from high school the student will not have a teacher who specializes in visual impairment or braille. Materials are not as readily available, so each student must advocate for his or her own resources. Young adults who have never done this before will likely have a difficult time.

The priority in public school years is to meet academic demands: make it through the course work, homework, testing demands. Sometimes it is difficult to see the big picture and do more than just make it through each day. Planning for the future is something we will do in the future. But the future is now, and to prepare now is to be better able to take advantage of education and employment opportunities when they arise.

The student and the supporting team including the family should stop and see the big picture. Students with visual impairment need to be taught critical skills in Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) areas in addition to the core academic subject areas. Sometimes it is difficult to move off the track with which we are accustomed and change directions, even though we know it would be best. It brings to mind the saying: "Give a man a fish; you have fed him today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime."

We have done a good job of giving our students their daily fish, but given the constraints of the academic pressures and other district priorities, it has been difficult to find time and ways to teach the students to fish for themselves. We must teach them how to access resources and information and to make decisions for themselves about what tools and strategies to use in different situations. This will help them develop self-determination skills and prepare them for transition.

Volunteer experiences can be a way to bridge the two worlds and can be one piece we use to help make meaningful and smooth transitions for our VI students. Volunteer experiences are a way for our

VI students to practice and use skills they have learned in ECC areas like social skills, O&M skills, self advocacy skills, career awareness skills, visual efficiency skills, independent living skills. Practice using these skills helps them generalize the new skills from the school and home setting to a work setting. Volunteer work can also give individuals a way to safely practice these skills in a non-threatening environment, since they can't be fired. In addition, it gives them a way to demonstrate competence and build confidence.

Volunteering can be a good way to begin working on skills at a young age and can include helping at home with chores, in the neighborhood, at church, and other settings. It can also be a way for students with VI living in both rural and urban areas to have opportunities to practice.

Students who are visually impaired and their parents reflected on volunteer experiences in which they had recently participated. "The hands-on volunteer experience was a wonderful teaching and learning tool." "I learned that I could volunteer to help other people in need." "Opportunities for visually impaired people are endless." "I need to know what my options are."

One mentor with visual impairment said it gave her the chance to show her skills and become more confident about her abilities. Another said it was an opportunity to be the one giving instead of receiving all the time. Three of the mentors said that volunteer experiences turned into paying jobs after they got their foot in the door and proved themselves.

## **Learning New Skills**

In preparation for volunteer work teachers, job coaches, and parents can work with the student on skills related to work experience. Some activities for the student include:

- Develop a list of interests, strengths and preferences to guide when selecting volunteer opportunities.
- Research volunteer opportunities in the community. Look for those that are of interest that might be enjoyable.
- Contact potential volunteer sites to ask about volunteer jobs, specific jobs.
- Making inquiries about volunteer work can be an opportunity to practice using good phone and social etiquette.
- Write an ability statement and have a plan ahead of time describing the skills the student has. Volunteer staff will then know what the student will be able to do on specific volunteer jobs.
- Inquire about dressing and grooming appropriately for the volunteer job.
- Research travel options to get to and from the volunteer site.
- Self-advocacy skills: knowing how to introduce yourself when you arrive at site. Asking for assistance in previewing job tasks. Discussing how the job can be done. Working to independently accomplish as much as possible.



*Students with visual impairment do volunteer work at the food bank.*

Many of these skills learned in volunteer experiences are addressed in the ECC, the expanded core curriculum areas. ECC goals could be included in the student's individualized educational plan (IEP). TVI's could develop a unit of study to do with the VI student.

- Compensatory skills: communication with volunteer site. Practice literacy skills in real life situation.
- Orientation and mobility: travel to and from volunteer site, travel within the job site, map reading.
- Social Skills: introducing self, working with others, practicing good listening skills.
- Independent Living Skills: dressing and grooming appropriately for job, preparing a sack lunch, laundering and pressing work clothing.
- Recreation and Leisure Skills: having meaningful topics of interest to talk about at volunteer experience.
- Career Education: exploring interests, work ethic.
- Assistive Technology: using assistive technology to access information, possibly use on the volunteer site. Technology may include a computer, note taker, magnifiers, telescopes, etc.
- Visual Efficiency Skills: know what works visually and have in mind possible adaptations and strategies to use in different situations. Problem solving in different environments. For example: reducing glare (sun glasses, hat, lighting). Low vision devices such as magnifiers/telescopes that will be used on the volunteer job site.
- Self-Determination: Making decisions and choices about preferences and possible volunteer experiences. Knowing strengths and having an ability statement addressing how you will accomplish the volunteer job.

# **TSBVI Short-Term Programs Presents “Austin City Limits: Music and Songwriting” for Students with Visual Impairments**

John Rose, teacher, Short-Term Programs,  
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Abstract:** A special long weekend short term program at TSBVI on music and songwriting is described. Students visited recording studios, wrote songs, listened to live music performances and visited the music program at the University of Texas at Austin.

**Keywords:** music, songwriting, recording

Short-Term Programs at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) offered a weekend class devoted to music and songwriting in March 2013 that introduced students to skills related to the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), including creative literary expression, socialization, recreation and leisure, technology, and career education. Students who attended the music and songwriting class were granted access to aspects of music, such as professional studio recording, working musicianship, and a university music program that most people are never privy to. In addition, students were presented opportunities for creative writing and encouraged to explore various perspectives and invoke the senses when writing original songs. Students practiced choice making and independence, worked with others collaboratively while advocating for their ideas and needs within the group, and had a unique opportunity to communicate with other students with visual impairments from another state. Students who attended this weekend class stimulated their creative energy, writing skills, and love of music in the dynamic environment of Austin, Texas, the “Live Music Capital of the World.”

On Friday, students met for a songwriting workshop led by Attendance Records, an Austin-based organization dedicated to encouraging students to find their own voice through the creative writing process ([www.attendancerecords.org](http://www.attendancerecords.org)). Students used either a Brailenote, laptop, or pencil and paper to participate in the activities. The workshop began with free write exercises, followed by a lesson on perspective taking. Students worked individually to write a song or story from the perspective of an animal or insect. At the end of the class, students read their work and their peers tried to guess which creature the author had chosen.

Following the songwriting workshop, students spent the afternoon at Estuary Recording Studio. Following a basic introduction to music recording and how a recording studio functions, students were allowed to have a hands-on view of the mixing console to gain a better understanding of recording tracks and the many options available for mixing sound. The studio engineer pulled up a recent recording by a local Austin band (Belaire), and he showed us how tracks can be isolated, what vocal doubling can do to provide a “larger-than-life” vocal sound, and how reverberation can be added to tracks to make them sound “warmer” or like they are in a larger room. We were able to explore the

concept of sound reverberation in great depth, because this studio is one of the few with a reverb chamber built to match a 1950s design. Students were allowed to enter and explore the plaster chamber, and they got to hear the chamber's effect on their voices and learn exactly how and why sound does what it does in the chamber.

On Saturday morning, students visited the University of Texas Butler School of Music. Two composers and doctoral students in music, Joshua Shank and Eli Fieldsteel, hosted our group.



Following student introductions, the two composers described their paths to graduate school in music and discussed with the students the many options available in a music program at the university level. Students received another lesson in the basics of sound, how it travels in waves, reflection, absorption, and amplification.

After this basic introduction to sound, Mr. Shank, a music composer for choral groups, described the process of “setting a piece,” or taking words and producing a choral arrangement. He gave an example of an Octavio Paz poem that was set by a composer named Eric Whittaker, played the piece for the class, and discussed the meaning of the poem and how that was affected by the way the composer had set the piece to music. He discussed synesthesia, the way that hearing music can produce a variety of other sense impressions, and students asked questions that led to discussions about how art is received by an audience, about the musical “hook”, and about how later sections of a musical piece can reference earlier sections.

*Cassie uses a sound board*

As for electronic music, Mr. Fieldsteel described the basics of electronic composition, how it required the computer manipulation of sound waves to produce arrangements that the composer feels are musically relevant. He described an idea he had to write music based on street sounds, such as car engines, tail pipes, and other car noises. To give the students an idea of what electronic composition means, he played some of the original sounds, then he played a portion of the final piece. Students

discussed the relevance of the music and how it made them feel. Following this demonstration, Mr. Fieldsteel described the Supercollider software for electronic music production and how it can be used to manipulate various sound waves (e.g. sine wave, white noise, saw wave) to produce beats and melodies. Students reveled in the demonstration of taking these sound waves, clipping and condensing them to produce the basic beats that make up the “dubstep” music genre. Our morning concluded with a description about how Mr. Fieldsteel won a music competition by playing a building, an installation piece using subwoofers and contact microphones attached to parts of the Bass Concert Hall.

On Saturday afternoon, members of an Austin-based band, Blue Mist, met us in the TSBVI auditorium to discuss what it is like to be a working musician. They provided a panel discussion about all the elements of playing music as a band: getting started in music and forming a band, creating and developing chemistry among band members, booking and playing gigs, and promoting and marketing the band. What made this an excellent opportunity for students in the Music and Songwriting class was that these musicians also all have visual impairments. So, they were able to also talk about how they get transportation and assistance with equipment at shows, how they work with musicians who are sighted, and how they deal with the “elephant in the room” that is visual impairment. Following the

panel, the band played four songs for us that got us all clapping our hands, and some students even got up close to the stage and were dancing.



On Saturday evening, students produced a group recording facilitated by BeatLab. BeatLab is an after school program that brings together the talent and experience of professional musicians and record producers, with the latest digital music production technology, to elementary, middle and high school classrooms. BeatLab programs are designed to foster effective creativity on both an individual and a group basis. By recording together, students practiced problem solving, task management and collaboration in the creative process. The final product was a song produced in cooperation with the instructor and distributed among the class. The recording was extremely successful, and students felt a great sense of accomplishment from producing such a professional group sound.

*Kwentisha plays the guitar*

On Sunday morning, students had the opportunity to communicate with a group of students at the Kentucky School for the Blind who were also attending a short-term program. We used the videoconferencing facilities in the Outreach Department at TSBVI, and students seemed to enjoy the high-tech nature of this form of communication, and they appreciated the ability to hear the point of view of students in another state. Students discussed career prep programs in both states, musical interests and abilities, sports programs (especially goalball), and a very emotional discussion developed when a student in our program asked about how the students in Kentucky handled bullying, if it had ever happened to them. Both groups shared great strategies, especially that talking it out and not walking away is a must. In addition, the groups agreed that visiting short-term programs makes them feel more comfortable, because the classes give them a feeling that they have peers who are understanding.

During the music and songwriting class, students learned about a variety of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) skills related to one of their passions: music and songwriting. In the process, friendships emerged from sharing in each other's successes, and the opportunity to interact with other students with visual impairments reminded them that they are not alone in the challenges they face in their lives.

[Attendance Records:](http://attendancerecords.org/)

<http://attendancerecords.org/>

[BeatLab music production & recording for youth:](http://cinelasamericas.org/media-education)

<http://cinelasamericas.org/media-education>

[Blue Mist:](http://www.bluemistband.com/)

<http://www.bluemistband.com/>

[Estuary Recording:](http://www.estuaryrecording.com/)

<http://www.estuaryrecording.com/>

[Supercollider audio synthesis programming language:](http://www.audiosynth.com/)

<http://www.audiosynth.com/>

[University of Texas Butler School of Music:](http://www.music.utexas.edu/)

<http://www.music.utexas.edu/>



*Matthew controls the sound board*

## How TSBVI Became TSBVI

William Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: The history of innovations in services for students with visual impairment, educators and other service providers provided by TSBVI

Key Words: TSBVI, visually impaired, blind, Texas Legislature

People come from all over the United States and the world to visit the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Many initially got to know us from our website and our publications. Many know us through the speeches and writings of Dr. Phil Hatlen or through any number of current or former TSBVI staff who have been such strong national leaders in their particular area of professional interest. I've even run across a few TSBVI visitors who were perhaps a little more interested in Austin—great Mexican food and live music—than in getting to know our school. It's all good and we are pleased to have them drop in on us.

Among those who come with serious intent to observe and discuss our school's programs and services, there is a common question: "How did TSBVI become one of the flagship schools in the world?" I've been asked the question enough times that I've really had to think about it. Others might describe this history differently, but I'm going to do my best to represent what happened and what continues to happen today.

I see four main themes that are pretty fair explanations for how TSBVI became TSBVI:

1. We've had great and consistent support from the Texas Legislature,
2. In our own backyard, the University of Texas turned out a legion of Teachers of the Visually Impaired who would go on to become leaders in the field,
3. The school began a path of innovation in the 1980's and has never let up, and
4. We are in Austin.

The Texas Legislature is not known for being a big spender on the education front, and during austere times they reduced TSBVI's budget much as they did all other state agencies. But in many other states with which I'm familiar, their legislatures seem to do something akin to keeping their schools under a perpetual cloud of budget reductions, threats of closure or poorly conceived changes in governance. In that atmosphere a school thinks more about survival than innovation. Much of what TSBVI has accomplished has been because we've been appropriately funded, and the recent and large investment the legislature made to rebuild our 1916 campus is unparalleled in the world. Lastly, the House and Senate leadership has always treated us with respect because they like our mission.

The teacher training program at the University of Texas (UT) was the center of the universe for most of us Texans in the 1960's and 70's. Dr. Natalie Barraga ran the program and everyone in the U.S.,

and many around the world, knew of her work. Interestingly, Dr. Barraga had taught at TSBVI during the 1950's. She was later joined at UT by Drs. Anne Corn and Jane Erin. UT turned out great teachers, and a good number of them became very influential in the growth and evolution of the field. Some of the very best came to TSBVI and stayed for many years, and perhaps as many as 20 of those from the early days are still here doing excellent teaching or other educational leadership activities.

By the late 1970's and early 1980's TSBVI began to look at its mission with a willingness to try new things. One of the first was the establishment of independent living cottages that taught a curriculum of personal and household management that is now the norm across the school's entire residential program. Outreach programs and the development of a curriculum department, now known for its many publications in circulation around the world, soon followed. It was this focus of significantly directing the school's resources in ways that would benefit local educational programs across the state that separated TSBVI from the way the vast majority of Schools for the Blind did business. Today, this is often imitated but never equaled in terms of resource allocation and local impact.

In September 1997 the TSBVI website was launched, and would eventually become the most accessed website on the education of students who are blind or visually impaired at home and internationally. Today, the innovation continues in many large and small ways. Our decade-long partnership with Texas Tech and Stephen F. Austin Universities is the only one of its type in the U.S., and is responsible for training the vast majority of Texas teachers of students with visual impairment (TVI's) and orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). Perhaps the Next Big Thing for us has to do with how we use distance education technologies to reach more people in ways that fit their needs. This work is already in progress.

Our school's focus on returning students to their home communities in a well-organized transition process once the student and the sending ISD are ready to achieve greater success at the local level, is done here with greater intentionality than at any other school for the blind in the country. This is a work in progress that is complicated and far from perfect, but it is leading to students with closer ties to home and community, and is also allowing for more students to access the intensive services TSBVI can offer.

Lastly, TSBVI is very fortunate to be in Austin, Texas. There are many great cities in our state, but Austin has provided some unique advantages. We are in the state capitol and have easy access to government, to the Texas Education Agency and to the main offices of partners such as the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Division of Blind Services (DBS). People like to come here and people like to stay here, and this has allowed TSBVI to hang onto many talented people. Austin is known as a blind-friendly town, and our community embraces our students and makes all of us who work here feel like our efforts are valued.

So when visitors from other states or around the world come to visit TSBVI and express a desire for their own state or country to replicate what we do, I have to pause and smile. There is no easy

answer and there are many intangibles. Funding and governmental support alone is not the answer. Access to great universities, a desire to innovate or being located in a world-class town won't get it done by itself. It just all played a part in putting "something in the water" at TSBVI that keeps us striving to lead, follow and collaborate with those all around our great state who have made the education of students with visual impairments their mission in life.

## **An Inspiration to All of Us**

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

Abstract: a young man in the Transition Program fulfills his dream to make his hometown a better and cleaner place to live.

Key words: blind, visually impaired, Division for Blind Services, Transition, independence, Clean Up Club

We always enjoy sharing success stories about our consumers, and this is one about a young man who is inspiring others in his community. You've probably heard the motto, "Think globally and act locally." I think this fits Oscar because he is taking action locally that is getting him statewide and national attention.

Oscar has received services from the Division of Blind Services (DBS) Blind Children's Program in Laredo, from our Transition Program team in McAllen, and he is now on the caseload of our new transition counselor in his home town of Laredo. DBS has helped with counseling and guidance services, with ideas and resources to keep his cleanup club running, and with transportation assistance.

DBS staff learned from Oscar's mother that he was having difficulty in school. DBS transition staff intervened by helping Oscar's mom learn to advocate on his behalf with the school principal and the special education director, requesting an admissions review and dismissal meeting (ARD) and a review of the issues that were concerning them.

Although Oscar had learned some independent living skills at the time he applied for services with DBS, he still needed extensive help in this area. Because of his limited range of motion, he wanted some help in the kitchen area. Mary Trejo, DBS vocational rehabilitation teacher, provided Oscar with an array of specialized services and devices to address his needs. Oscar also participated in the White Cane Day event last fall by joining the orientation and mobility activities, learning more about self-advocacy, and networking with some of his peers.

Next on the horizon for this ambitious young man is a trip to Austin in May to accept the 2013 Texas Environmental Excellence Award in the youth category. Arrangements are also underway for him to tour the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center while he is in town.

I'm so very proud that the DBS team has been there to support this individual's dreams and goals. Without further introduction, here is Oscar's story as recently shared by his former Transition Counselor, Pearl de la Cruz:

Oscar Medina IV is a 12-year-old boy from Laredo who is a true inspiration. He wants to be a scientist and president of the United States one day. He's described as an enthusiastic young man who is family oriented, helpful, and devoted to keeping his city and the environment clean. He also is legally blind, and his arm and upper body have limited movement capability.

When Oscar and his family went to the McAllen Blind Services offices of DARS, the staff immediately went to work. He entered the transition program, where counselors taught him to advocate for himself, boosted his self-esteem, and set him on the road to success.

He told his transition counselors about his interest in the environment and how he wanted to make his hometown a better and cleaner place to live, and they set out to help him achieve his goal. So Oscar, his family, and a few DARS staff members helped create the "Cleanup Club," which strives to beautify Laredo through planting trees, gardening, picking up trash, and promoting recycling. DARS staff also helped Oscar locate a facility for his Cleanup Club, found networking, mentoring, and volunteer work opportunities, and put him in touch with other community agencies. DARS provided assistive technology services support for his Cleanup Club.

The Cleanup Club has become so successful that it has grown to 70 members and continues to add new members. Oscar's club has even formed a partnership with the City of Laredo Waste Department to roll recycling bags and process them for customers to use. Members have planted more than 30 trees and recycled more than 30,000 plastic bags.

Oscar's passion for beautifying his city led the local Laredo Morning Times newspaper to nominate him for the Jefferson Award for public services, a prestigious national recognition system honoring community and public service in America.

Oscar won the Jefferson Award and three additional awards for his efforts to beautify Laredo and protect the environment: the Keep Texas Beautiful Ruthe Jackson Youth Leadership Award, the Keep America Beautiful National Award, and the Texas Environmental Excellence Award. He also received a plaque from Laredo Mayor Raul Salinas.

Even after all of his honors, Oscar still devotes time to help beautify Laredo and promote the Cleanup Club. "I want to thank everybody," he says. "I made the club to keep the world beautiful."

And that's exactly what he does.

# My Child Needs Cosmetic Surgery

Al'An Kesler, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS),  
Blind Children's Program Field Specialist

Abstract: issues to consider when exploring the option of cosmetic surgery.

key words: cosmetic surgery, blind, visually impaired, employment

Our children are perfect. They are unique, wonderful individuals who come to us with the most diverse and lovely attributes that make each and every one of them exactly who they are, themselves. We know this because we know them and are blessed they are a part of our lives. The world however often does not know our child and often judges our children solely on the immediate physical perception that they get from them in a matter of seconds. This is wrong, but this is reality. It is reality particularly when looking for a job. A job is often obtained or lost in the first 20 to 60 seconds of meeting the person who is doing the hiring. First impressions do matter. It is important that our children succeed at first impressions so that they get the opportunity to move beyond them. Many of our kids have disabling conditions that bring with them a wide array of physical anomalies as well. Many of these can be corrected to be more in line with physical norms but their correction will not improve your child's medical condition or restore function, so fall in a category that is considered "cosmetic".

Cosmetic concerns often remain unaddressed for a number of reasons:

- Concern that discussing it will cause hurt feelings by giving the child or parent the idea that the child is not accepted or valued as he or she should be.
- Cosmetic issues are often felt to be uncorrectable because typical funding does not cover cosmetic problems.
- Discomfort on the part of service providers that they will offend their client/patient so they often will not address unless asked specifically.
- A general feeling that it is "wrong" to focus on these physical attributes and to do so diminishes the person who brings it up, particularly a parent. How can I unconditionally love my child if I am focused on these things?

## What to do?

It is as important to your child to address these issues as it is any barrier that stands between your child and their ability to achieve their highest level of independence and productivity. It is important to move beyond the discomfort, misperceptions or negative self-talk and move into the light of what is available to help. Your child, like every child, places a high level of importance to "fitting in", "belonging" and being similar to their peers. How we appear to others plays a keen role in this process.

## Get Started

Bring up the topic. Discussions with medical personnel are often the first step. Put it in its proper place and remove the shadows that lurk and create misperceptions and bad feelings. It is what it is. Who among us do not have a physical attribute or two (or more) that could stand correcting? It will be only what you allow it to be.

Bring it to the attention of your Division of Blind Services (DBS) Blind Children's Specialist and/or Transition Counselor. They are a primary resource to help you identify and find the financial resources to address these issues, including Medicaid, health insurance, waiver programs, DARS/DBS, etc. They are also your partner to help with your child's development of the core skills of adjustment to blindness and disability, self-confidence, and self-advocacy. These are core skills needed for successful adult living and greatly depend on our self-perception.

Our children are perfect, and needed cosmetic surgery only serves to frame that perfection in such a way, that everyone can see it just as clearly as we do.

### **The Lily Voelkel Foundation "Pays It Forward" With Love and Compassion for Children with Vision and Hearing Losses and Their Families.**

Compiled by Gigi Newton, Early Childhood Specialist, Texas Deafblind Project,  
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: this article describes the work of the Lily Voelkel Foundation and how they provide resonance boards to families. Information about the benefits of using a resonance board is also included

Key words: Deafblind, Lily Voelkel Foundation, resonances board, TSBVI,

It has been less than a year since Christi, Tyson & Eliana lost their little daughter, Lily Voelkel. In the physical world, Lily touched so many lives in so many different ways. In our memories and hearts, Lily continues to touch so many through her generous family, as they continue to spread their love and compassion.

In honor of her memory, newly made (handcrafted by one of Lily's great-uncles, Uncle John) resonance boards have been sent to Texas Deafblind Outreach to go to the homes of children like Lily to provide hands-on activities to enhance learning and development. These boards can be expensive for families faced with such special needs kids and we are thrilled to bring them to families in need.

In early February, I had the honor of delivering two resonance boards with Christi Voelkel and her mother Barbara, to two wonderful families in the Austin area. It was a memorable day for everyone:

moms, grand moms, children, and teachers!

The Lily Voelkel Foundation donated nine resonance boards to TSBVI Outreach to give to families. The cost of a resonance board is \$249.00 per board or about \$ 369.00 with shipping. The Lily Voelkel Foundation has contributed to the improvement of the lives of many children with deafblindness and multiple disabilities by providing the resonance boards. The joy and knowledge little Miss Lily brought to this family and others is continuing to live on. This family is truly "paying it forward."

## **What Is the Resonance Board?**

Teachers and caregivers tend to place children on soft surfaces such as blankets or rugs. However, a soft surface doesn't provide much information to a blind child. For instance, when the child drops a toy, there is no sound to indicate where it landed. It simply disappears.

The resonance board is a thin, flexible sheet of wood (four feet by four feet is the smallest size for a resonance board) that gives tactile and auditory feedback whenever the child moves. When the child kicks the board, there is a sound and a vibration. This feedback encourages the child to repeat the movement, and eventually to experiment with other movements as well. The child moves independently, without an adult manipulating his or her body. Sounds created by the child's movements resonate from the wood. This immediate feedback can help the brain integrate motor activity and listening skills.

I've gotten some very odd looks from physical therapists. I remember one child I visited at home. He was lying on a rug, his legs scissored, his back so arched you could see underneath it. The physical therapist said, "You're not going to put him on that board, are you? It's got no padding!" Before the session was over, the child's extension had broken up. He had used his hands at midline, and he was bending his knees so that the soles of his feet rested on the board. That night the physical therapist called me. She said, "You need to know that in the three years I've seen him, this is the first time he has ever moved that way without adult intervention." She was a big believer in the resonance board after that!

## **Ways to Use the Resonance Board**

The resonance board can be used in a variety of ways. Here are some examples.

1. An adult sits with the child and offers favorite items. The adult is the child's playmate, not a teacher. The adult does not talk or do hand-over-hand with the child.
2. The child lies alone on the board with favorite items around him/her.
3. The child uses the board while inside the Little Room. The adult is an observer. The adult notes what the child is doing and tries to determine which are the child's favorite items and activities. By collecting this data, the adult learns what interests the child; those items of interest can be used in other environments to support progress.

This information about the Resonance Board was taken from an article I wrote for Future Reflections, Convention Report 2012. [The Active Learning Approach: Using the Resonance Board and the Little Room with Young Blind and Multiply Disabled Children](#). To read the entire article go to:

<https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr31/4/fr310416.htm>

To read more about Active Learning please go to [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) and visit our [Active Learning page](#) at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/=3415>

### [The Lily Voelkel Foundation](#)

<http://lilyvoelkel.com/>

To request additional information, or a resonance board email:

[Christi.Voelkel@gmail.com](mailto:Christi.Voelkel@gmail.com)

or

[Giginewton@tsbvi.edu](mailto:Giginewton@tsbvi.edu)



## **New Federal Program Provides Communications Technology to People with Vision and Hearing Loss**

**Abstract:** This article provides information on the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program designed to provide assistive technology to people with a combined vision and hearing loss.

**Key Words:** National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, Deafblind, blind, Helen Keller National Center, Perkins, free communication equipment

The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) provides a wide array of assistive technology to people with combined vision and hearing loss. This new program from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the result of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act – a law championed by Arkansas Senator Mark Pryor and Massachusetts Congressman Edward Markey.

Any person who is considered deaf-blind as defined by the Helen Keller National Center Act can receive free communications equipment if their income is less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Find details at [www.fcc.gov/NDBEDP](http://www.fcc.gov/NDBEDP).

The FCC has chosen Perkins and Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) to head up the national program effort and work with partners in every state plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. To spread the word about the program, Perkins and HKNC have created a campaign called, iCanConnect.

“The mission of the Helen Keller National Center is to enable each person who is deaf-blind to live and work in his or her community of choice. This critical technology access program accelerates those efforts,” said HKNC Executive Director Joe McNulty.

Perkins President Steven Rothstein believes accessibility is critical to civil rights and equality for people with disabilities. “NDBEDP and iCanConnect are not simply about individuals who have vision and hearing loss getting easier access to the telephone, computer or email. It’s about their right to be contributing, involved members of society. And without equal access to today’s communication technology, that’s simply not possible.”

NDBEDP provides a wide range of specialized and “off-the-shelf” hardware, software and applications. Products include braille displays, computer screen readers and even iPhones and iPads with built-in accessibility features. The program also provides one-on-one training to help people use the equipment to its fullest.

“Having this technology – this ability to participate and interact with others, and remember your value and place in the world – is so significant,” said Jerry Berrier, an access technology consultant who is blind. He is working with Perkins to help manage the NDBEDP database and train consumers.

“We estimate that there are 1.5 million people in the U.S. who are deaf-blind. We believe about a million or more are eligible for this program. We’ll be changing lives,” said Betsy McGinnity, director of Perkins Training and Educational Resources Program.

To learn more, go to [www.iCanConnect.org](http://www.iCanConnect.org) or call 1-800-825-4595.



*A billboard advertising the iCanConnect program near El Paso, Texas*

# **We Must Provide Equal Opportunity in Sports to Students with Disabilities**

Arne Duncan U.S. Secretary of Education  
Excerpt from [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

**Abstract:** The author clarifies the legal obligation of schools to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in after-school athletics and clubs.

**Key Words:** blind, visually impaired, school sports, federal civil rights law

Playing sports at any level—club, intramural, or interscholastic—can be a key part of the school experience and have an immense and lasting impact on a student’s life. Among its many benefits, participation in extracurricular athletic activities promotes socialization, the development of leadership skills, focus, and, of course, physical fitness. It’s no secret that sports helped to shape my life. From a very early age, playing basketball taught me valuable lessons about grit, discipline, and teamwork that are still with me to this day.

Students with disabilities are no different – like their peers without disabilities, these students benefit from participating in sports. But unfortunately, we know that students with disabilities are all too often denied the chance to participate and with it, the respect that comes with inclusion. This is simply wrong. While it’s the coach’s job to pick the best team, students with disabilities must be judged based on their individual abilities, and not excluded because of generalizations, assumptions, prejudices, or stereotypes. Knowledgeable adults create the possibilities of participation among children and youth both with and without disabilities.

Today, ED’s Office for Civil Rights has released guidance that clarifies existing legal obligations of schools to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate alongside their peers in after-school athletics and clubs. We make clear that schools may not exclude students who have an intellectual, developmental, physical, or any other disability from trying out and playing on a team, if they are otherwise qualified. This guidance builds on a resource document the Department issued in 2011 that provides important information on improving opportunities for children and youth with disabilities to access PE and athletics.

Federal civil rights laws require schools to provide equal opportunities, not give anyone an unfair head start. So schools don’t have to change the essential rules of the game, and they don’t have to do anything that would provide a student with a disability an unfair competitive advantage. But they do need to make reasonable modifications (such as using a laser instead of a starter pistol to start a race so a deaf runner can compete) to ensure that students with disabilities get the very same opportunity to play as everyone else. The guidance issued today will help schools meet this obligation and will allow increasing numbers of kids with disabilities the chance to benefit from playing sports.

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired – Outreach Program  
Honors

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For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow  
or working as a VI professional contact KC Dignan at  
<kcd@tsbvi.edu>.



# Bulletin Board

## **Announcements/Regional, State, National Training and Events**

Mail or email your items for the Bulletin Board to Beth Bible:  
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756; or [bethbible@tsbvi.edu](mailto:bethbible@tsbvi.edu).  
An up-to-date [Statewide Staff Development Calendar](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm) is posted at  
[www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm).

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## **Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Program (BELL Program)**

June 10 - 14, 2013 Houston, TX  
June 17 - 21, 2013: Nacogdoches, TX  
June 24 - 28, 2013: Location: McAllen, TX

*Are you the parent of a blind child? Do you know someone who is?*

Sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind of Texas, the BELL program introduces blind and low vision children to the beauty of Braille through a one-week summer curriculum that is fun, creative, and comprehensive. This summer, enroll your child in the BELL program. BELL emphasizes the importance of Braille through a fun and creative curriculum that includes Braille and other essential blindness skills as well as the arts, science, and recreation. At BELL, students participate in confidence-building activities with blind peers and are mentored by independent, professional blind adults. Most importantly, they experience the beauty of Braille first-hand. To register, visit <http://nfbtx.org/bell-registration>. If you have any questions, call Richie Flores at (512) 323-5444 or email him at [president@nfbaustin.org](mailto:president@nfbaustin.org)

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## **June 11 - 13, 2013**

### **Texas Assistive Technology Network Statewide Conference**

Houston Texas Region 4 ESC 7145 W. Tidwell Road

Cost: \$105.00, Time: 8:00am - 4:30pm on all days

Contact Person: Kirk Behnke ([kbehnke@esc4.net](mailto:kbehnke@esc4.net))

This conference is sponsored by the Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN). Session and materials costs are partially funded through state or federal grants. For more information, or to register, go to [http://www.escweb.net/tx\\_esc\\_04/catalog/session.aspx?sessionId=942244](http://www.escweb.net/tx_esc_04/catalog/session.aspx?sessionId=942244).

**June 19 - 20, 2013**

## **Active Learning for Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments**

Houston Texas Region 4 ESC 7145 W. Tidwell Road

Cost: \$70.00, Time: 9:00am - 4:00pm on both days

Instructor(s): Gigi Newton, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Department; Patty Obrzut, OTR Penrickton Center for Blind Children

Learn the fundamentals of Active Learning Theory for students with visual and multiple impairments. Using this approach will move your students from passive to active learners utilizing enriched interaction techniques and environments designed for each stage of their development. Participants will learn to infuse IEP learning objectives throughout the day's activities, choose appropriate materials and adaptations and how to design the environment for success. Session and materials costs are partially funded through state or federal grants. For more information, or to register, go to [http://www.escweb.net/tx\\_esc\\_04/catalog/session.aspx?sessionId=921509](http://www.escweb.net/tx_esc_04/catalog/session.aspx?sessionId=921509).

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### **The 11th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference: Experience the Wonder**

July 25 - 28, 2013  
Scottsdale, Arizona

No matter whether it is your eleventh conference or your first, a CHARGE international conference is truly a wondrous experience. The 2011 conference had more than 850 attendees including individuals with CHARGE, their families, professionals and 65 experts on CHARGE syndrome. When families and professionals get together to share and learn, wonder fills the air.

For additional information check the [CHARGE Syndrome Foundation](http://chargesyndrome.org) website often. <http://chargesyndrome.org>

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### **Save the Dates for Braille Production Training!**

August 12-16, 2013

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Two consecutive training sessions in computer generated braille production for braillists or TVI's producing braille. The first days will be basic braille production including Nemeth, MathType, Scientific Notebook, Duxbury and Braille 2000. Computer generated tactile graphics along with use of graphics production embossers such as the Tiger. Literary and foreign language production braille will also be included. The second training session will focus on braille music, how to teach it and how to produce it using Dancing Dots software. Financial assistance is available. Check TSBVI.edu for additional details as they become available.

## TX SenseAbilities

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

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June 1st for the Summer edition  
September 1st for the Fall edition

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The audio version of *TX SenseAbilities* is provided by Learning Ally, Austin, Texas.



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