

SenseAbilities

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

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Contents

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Family Wisdom

Parent Perspective on Team Meetings	2
Communication Between Family and School: Creating a Communication Notebook	4
Parent Perspectives of The Power of Touch Workshop.....	6
Hunting with Dad	8
Keeping the Vision: Not Limiting Career Options Because of Perceptions	9
Keys to Driving with Low Vision	11
TAPVI Talks.....	13

Effective Practices

Becoming Empowered Through Self-Determination Skills	15
Let's Play.....	19

News & Views

Cafeteria Life	24
The Status of Services in the Blind Children's Program.....	25
Free Braille Book Bags from National Braille Press.....	26
Finding a Provider: new book announcement.....	27
Announcing: Special Education Record Keeping Folder from PACER.....	28
Publications from the Delta Gamma Center	28
Read This To Me!	29
Family Connect Brings Together Parents of Visually Impaired Children	30
Addled by ARDs? Here's a Popup You'll Like.....	31
Volunteer's Needed for our 3rd Annual Texas Charger's Retreat.....	32
National Braille Association: Ask an Expert.....	34
Website Information: The Better Hearing Institute	34

Bulletin Board

Regional, State and National Training and Events.....	36
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Having chores and responsibilities, as well as opportunities to help others, provides basic skills and experiences leading toward self-determination. Read about this and additional ways to prepare students for more self-determined lives in Effective Practices starting on page 15.

A collaborative effort of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
and the DARS Division for Blind Services

Parent Perspective on Team Meetings

By Karen Whitty, Parent, Bee Caves, TX

Abstract: A parent shares her team meeting strategies to build collaborative communication between her family and school personnel. The positive environment creates opportunities for creative problem-solving and leads to more meaningful and effective IEP meetings.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent-school collaboration, visual impairment, team meeting, IEP, special education

When asked to write an article on our personal experiences with team meetings, I was not only up for the challenge, but excited. We've had positive experiences with this particular type of meeting regarding our son's development. Team meetings are a time for everyone who is involved in our child's continual progress to get together and brainstorm on areas where he needs improvement, and how to help him achieve his goals without the constraints of an ARD hanging over us.

The parents typically request a team meeting. Anyone who is involved in our child's development meets to share successes, concerns and how to work out any issues that have come up since the last ARD. When we have our team meetings, we only use this time to express concerns towards our child's progress. It is important for us to leave any concerns that we may have with individuals working with our son on a more private level and not at the team meeting. We never want to put a team member on the spot or make them feel uncomfortable during the meeting, which would draw their focus away from our child and cause embarrassment.

Our son's team meetings are comprised of a wide range of persons who work directly with him. We invite his regular ed. teachers, resource teachers, therapists, VI and O&M instructors, aides, his brother and yes, grandparents too. If our dog could talk and offer useful suggestions we would bring him as well. As the old saying

goes, "The more the merrier!" We have not asked our son to attend these meetings as of yet. However, in the next academic school year, we intend to start involving him for part of the meetings, as it is time for him to start taking ownership in his own development and progress. Scary to think that our sweet boy will be out there one day without us, but that is the purpose of all these meetings isn't it?

One of the things that we like most about having such a variety of persons at these meetings is that everyone has input and ideas in problem-solving that are invaluable. There have been times when a therapist has made a suggestion regarding our son that has helped the aide or a teacher. There have also been times when the grandparents have offered suggestions that help the teachers. We have all heard the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, the person that came up with that saying must have had a child with challenges. When I look around the room at one of my son's team meetings, I see a village of people coming together for the common good of our child.

We typically like to have two team meetings per academic school year, one in the fall and one in spring. At first, I felt personally guilty for calling these meetings, but as time went on, we found out that everyone involved enjoyed the time we spent discussing our son, and that we were making a big difference in his development. The fall team meetings are generally held in

October when everyone has had a chance to get acclimated to the new school year. This is a great opportunity for new teachers to meet one another along with any family members or private therapists. We have found that the majority of teachers working with our son in regular ed. classrooms have never worked with a visually impaired child before. The fall team meetings provide a great time to address their questions regarding methods of his instruction. Some of these questions can not only be answered by his resource teacher, but also by his therapist, VI instructor, O&M and yes, Mom and Dad.

We usually call the spring team meeting a few weeks before his annual ARD. We like this meeting because we are able to prepare for his ARD without any formalities, reducing the stress of the ARD. It's a great time to discuss what annual goals our son has and has not achieved over the last academic year, and allows us to think over any goals that he should be able to attain during the upcoming school year.

This discussion also prompts new ideas developed between the team meeting and ARD. We are always excited to get an e-mail or phone call from a therapist or teacher who has a new IEP modification as a result of this meeting. There have even been times that we, as parents, have had items added to his our son's IEP at an ARD simply because we had time to think about topics that were discussed at the team meeting. Think of it as a scrimmage where strategies are put together for the big game. Overall, these team meetings allow for more efficient use of everyone's time, simply because we do not have to go back and make constant changes to his IEP.

Having realistic expectations for our child and for his team members is important. We often have to ask ourselves if a goal is something that our child can do at this time, or if we should address it in the fu-

ture. In the past, we have had to postpone one goal in order to prioritize another. One of our philosophies is to use our child's strengths to build upon his weaknesses. We never say "never." In some cases during these meetings, we've had to strongly state what we believe our son can accomplish, and we have experimented with his IEP. Some experiments have been clearly successful, but others have not. Once, in a team meeting, the VI teacher said that she felt like we failed because our child was not able achieve one of these IEP goals. My response to her was that the real failure would have been if we had not tried at all.

One thing that is important to us is the environment of the meeting. We try to keep it positive and focused on our child. We often bring food to these meetings, whether it be an afternoon coffee, lunch or even breakfast. Breakfast tacos have always been a huge hit.

It is also important to consider the time of year. We never hold our fall team meetings at the beginning of the year. We believe that everyone needs time to get acclimated to each other and to the new school year schedule. It is also important to consider if it is ARD season within the school district. Our particular school district has their ARD season in the Spring. I would rather not call a "meeting of the minds" for my son when everyone is overwhelmed by upcoming ARDs. Let's face it, when you have a lot on your plate it is hard to stay focused.

The overall benefits of team meetings have been invaluable to us as a family. We have learned so much from these professionals who work with our son. Most of all, the team meetings have opened the door to a much higher level of communication between teachers, therapists, aides and family members. It gives a greater understanding of how everyone is working with our son to become independent and successful.

Communication Between Family and School: Creating a Communication Notebook that Works

By Myrna Medina and Jackie Kenley, California Deaf-Blind Services Family Specialists
Reprinted with permission from *reSources* Winter 2007, California Deaf-Blind Services.
To view this and other issues of *reSources*, go to www.sfsu.edu/~cadbs/News.html.

Abstract: The authors share tips for facilitating communication between school and home. One author provides us a personal glimpse in how the communication notebook benefits her daughter.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent-school collaboration, special education, effective communication tips, IEP

A communication notebook or daily journal is a book that goes back and forth from home to school, and the idea has been around for a while. It seems to be something commonly used in special education.

It is important for parents to know what is happening with their children during the school day—regardless of whether or not their children have disabilities. Home-school communication is one of the most important and necessary factors in developing good relationships between classroom teams and families. Due to busy work schedules, lack of time, and transportation challenges, the opportunities to meet in person are limited.

Teachers and school teams benefit when parents share information about medical issues that may affect the student's behavior at school. It can be beneficial to the family and school team when they share ideas and successes with communication skills as well as other skills. Perhaps it is worthwhile to take a look at how we might better use this notebook tool with our students who are deaf-blind.

Educators and parents may see a picture in their minds of a beleaguered teacher at the end of the school day with a stack of notebooks that need to be written in. One possible solution for the team of the student who is deaf-blind may be if the student has a one-on-one aide or intervener;

it may be useful to have that person writing in the communication book. The intervener/one-on-one will probably have spent most of the day with the student and be more attuned to what has happened at school. Also they will be aware of the communication [system?] the student is using and the different therapies that (s)he participated in that day. The teacher may then be free to write about special things that have happened, or concerns about the student. Also the student's therapists such as Occupational therapist, Physical therapist, Orientation and Mobility, Speech and Vision therapists may find time to write on occasion and send messages home through the person writing in the notebook.

If the student has a home program it may be good to have the home staff write something in the communication book from time to time. Sharing ideas and strategies can be helpful to both the home and school teams.

It is, of course, important to send things—money, notices, emergency info—all sorts of things back and forth between home and school. These can be included with the notebook and this is a job the one-on-one might also help with.

Some teams may like to write long narratives but others may find that too time consuming. Most important is that the home school notebook is effective and it meets

The minute you walk through the door...

By Jackie Kenley, California Deaf-Blind Services Family Specialist

When my daughter comes home from school on the bus, we have developed a routine through the years. She seems to do best with routines and these routines meet my needs as well (e.g., her basic need to get a drink and go to the bathroom and my basic need to find out what has happened that day at school). Because of her limited communication, the home-school notebook is a particularly needed resource for me. Each day, I reach for the notebook in her backpack and try to get an idea of what's up. Of course, life interrupts all routines, but I find this time well spent and it helps us with our plans for the rest of the day. It also helps me to know about things that need to be celebrated, things that need to be more clearly understood, and sometimes things that need to be addressed.

Some days I receive a quick note with the "basics" about her schedule, such as what she has eaten that day. Some days may be special because she has done something really exciting and new, or even comical...like throwing her folded cane in the trash can that has a permanent top! The team may have concerns about her health or there may be a cry for help from the school team about how tough things have been. This cry for help may just be a negative report but I have learned the importance of a follow up call. A longer note back to school—sometimes to schedule a team meeting—may also be helpful. Sometimes just letting members of the school team know that I understand and know they are trying their best seems to be very important to them. When I read about a less-than-positive persistent problem, the team and I can meet and often come up with ideas that support the team and help turn things around for my daughter. The home-school notebook can help facilitate comfortable, non-confrontational team meetings that are so helpful. It is something that I often wish for every child's team.

I have had the opportunity to speak with teachers in college classes throughout the years and I always emphasize the importance of using a home-school notebook to communicate with families. I suggest that they try to write about something positive that occurred during the school day. At times, this may be a bit tough for the school staff but it can be a good practice and it is certainly encouraging to families. How many school situations could be turned around by good communication? The home-school notebook allows families and teams to work together to make the system (and program) work more effectively for the student.

the needs of the child, team, and family; that it is used regularly; and is simple, honest, and positive, as well as understandable for all.

When writing in a communication notebook there are things we might want to consider. Things to consider are:

- Something the student did for the first time at home or school, or something the student is beginning to do on a
- Something the student may be anxious about
- Something that occurred physically—illness, bowel movement, menstrual period
- What is going on at home—visitors, activities, work schedules, home staff

more regular basis, whether or not we see this as positive or negative

- How much sleep the student has gotten
- What the student has eaten or drunk and how that seems to affect him or her
- Who the student interacted with socially, and how (s)he seemed to feel about that—interaction with friends, classmates, family
- Who are the student’s buddies—what activities do they share?
- Who the student has interacted with to work/learn, and how the student felt about that—staff, therapist
- Physical and communication patterns during the day/week that may show how the student is feeling
- What is happening on the bus?
- What happened today that was not so positive?
- Very Important: What happened today that was positive???!!!

Parent Perspectives of The Power of Touch Workshop

Compiled by Jean Robinson, Family Specialist, TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: Parents share the results of participating in a hands-on workshop with their children who have visual and multiple impairments. Participants learned new ways to communicate tactually with their child.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent workshop, tactile communication, Barbara Miles, visual and multiple impairments, infant massage, BART, bonding and relation techniques, deafblind, visual impairment

This year TSBVI Outreach had the pleasure of sponsoring two weekend workshops for families to learn new ways to communicate with their children through observation and touch. The common factor in these families was that their children were non-verbal. The first training focused on children who are deafblind, many of whom were mobile. The second training consisted of many children who were non-ambulatory. Each family invited one member of their educational team to participate with them.

The primary workshop presenter was Barbara Miles, author of *Talking the Language of the Hands to the Hands* (1999), and co-editor with Marianne Riggio of *Remarkable Conversations: A guide to developing meaningful communication with children and young adults who are deafblind* (1999). She spoke about the develop-

ment of hand skills in children who have sensory impairments and the significance of hands for both receptive and expressive communication. After hearing about theory and intervention strategies for developing the tactual sense, participants had the opportunity to try these strategies. First they were able to practice with children other than their own—which gave them a chance to really get to know each other and facilitated their learning—and then to connect with their own children.”

Gigi Newton and Stacy Shafer, Outreach Specialists in Early Childhood and Deafblindness as well as certified Infant Massage instructors, shared information on B.A.R.T. (Bonding And Relaxation Techniques) and its benefits to children with sensory impairments. Experience and research has shown physical, psychological and emotional benefits to both the parent

and child. Each family met individually with Outreach specialists trained in B.A.R.T. to discuss their primary concerns related to their child. Parents then had the opportunity to learn and practice specific massage strokes with their children.

These workshops made such an impact on these families that I want to share some of their comments.

Tammy from Lufkin

After attending this incredible workshop I came away with a completely different perspective of my son's world. The workshop was presented in a relaxed, loving environment that really facilitated learning. Being able to listen in the classroom, practice the strategies with our own child and then observe all the children on videotape was so powerful. I am still learning and allowing Jonathan to teach me more.

The stories that were shared about children who are born blind really touched my heart. One girl first discovered that she was different about the age of seven when she asked her teacher to look at her new barrette. Her teacher had to touch the barrette on the girl's head before the girl knew that her teacher had "seen" it. It truly pointed out to me, the significance of touch to a child with a visual impairment.

I now look at my hands differently. I suppose that I have taken them for granted. When we were asked as a group to say what kinds of things we used our hands for—things like typing, writing, cooking, driving, putting on makeup, etc.—it was pointed out that we mainly use our hands as tools to do things for ourselves. Then it was explained that people with blindness or a visual impairment use their hands as an organ—like eyes—and grabbing their hands to touch something would be the

same as poking someone in the eye to make them "look" at an object.

I have a completely new appreciation of hands as tools, eyes, and ears. I look at my son in a different light. Now I am really paying attention to how I help Jonathan use his hands to "see" things. This training has helped me to be a better mom and teacher by opening my eyes to new ways of showing Jonathan the world around him.

Naomi from Houston

The Power of Touch weekend was an amazing experience for my child and our family. My husband and I have noticed that Michael has been able to have a bowel movement easier since we have started the massage strokes that were taught to us that weekend. It's an awesome feeling when your child can have a bowel movement without struggling. Thanks Gigi!!!"

I especially cherish the times when Michael and I just sit there and touch each other's hands. It is bonding time that I will forever enjoy sharing with him. It has helped me to understand how he feels at the moment. I feel we have connected so much more since we have come back home. I will strive to open up my son's world by letting him explore his surroundings more. This will be a fulfilling experience for the both of us.

Other parents have shared that this training was the pivotal point in their lives in finally understanding how their children interpret the world and learn. It made an incredible difference in the techniques used both at home and at school to make the world meaningful to the child. If you are interested in this type of training, please share this information with your educational team and contact Outreach here at TSBVI.

Hunting with Dad

By Sue Shaffer, Parent, Shippensburg, PA

Reprinted with permission from *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, Fall 2007, available at
<www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp/index.htm>

Abstract: A hunting trip for a father and his son with deafblindness is adapted so they can participate in this rite of passage with their friends. The steps taken to prepare for the trip and the hunt are described.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblindness, CHARGE Syndrome, autism, blind, visual impairment, hunting

Daniel Shaffer turned 12 last summer, an age when most boys, at least where we live, start hunting with dad. Daniel's dad Steve loves to hunt. He counts the days each year until the season starts. Last fall Steve was a little depressed when hunting season approached. Daniel was born with CHARGE Syndrome, is deafblind, and has autism. Although Steve had known all along that Daniel would probably not be a hunter, many of his friends had sons who were also turning 12 and getting their hunting permits and it really hit home when he realized his son wouldn't be joining him out in the woods.

Christmas came with a huge surprise. Friends Chaz Finkenbinder and Shawn Frick presented Steve and Daniel with a very special gift, an adapted hunting trip for children with special needs. The hunt would be during the spring gobbler season. What a wonderful and thoughtful gift! We knew that Daniel really didn't understand hunting or what it was about, but the fact that someone had seen the importance to Steve of being able to hunt with his son was wonderful.

Steve started taking Daniel to a friend's house to practice holding a gun, loading it, and pulling the trigger. Steve sat on a chair and had Daniel sit in front of him. They put a camera tripod in front of Daniel to stabilize the barrel of the gun. Steve was able to

look over Daniel's shoulder to aim for the target. They also sat in a "blind" because turkeys are very visually perceptive to any type of movement. Daniel became familiar with the sound of the gun and the feel of the gun when he pulled the trigger.

April 21 was the big day. Steve was nervous the night before with thoughts like "How in the heck will a turkey ever come close enough to shoot with all the noise Daniel makes?" and "I don't really think the guide understands some of Daniel's disabilities," and finally, "Well, I guess we'll give it a shot." We set the alarm clock for 3:30 a.m. (who came up with this idea?) and got up and headed to the farm to meet our hunting guide as well as a videographer who would tape the entire hunt. Our local fish and game club had already presented Daniel with a gun and he was dressed in camouflage just like dad. The guide gave Daniel a turkey call to use, a very easy push-button call that Daniel could operate by himself. Daniel was so excited about getting to "hang with the guys" that we didn't even have to ask him to smile for the photographer! And though he did make noise when we were sitting in the blind, the guide knew just when to use the turkey call to cover the noise. After about an hour or so of watching and waiting (and freezing!), as if on cue, Daniel fell asleep for about 15 minutes, and while all was quiet, three turkeys walked right up to us!

Steve woke Daniel up and said "Okay buddy, time to pull the trigger." With help aiming the gun, Daniel pulled the trigger and shot a jakey (little male turkey). It was unbelievable! The guide, the photographer, and the videographer went nuts! They were so excited they couldn't find their way out of the blind! It was a terrific gift and definitely a memory of a lifetime. And a lesson for mom on why she doesn't hunt (3:30 a.m. in the cold!), but this was one hunt I wouldn't have missed for anything.



Daniel and Dad after successful turkey hunt.

Keeping the Vision: Not Limiting Career Options Because of Perceptions

By Ann Edie, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Albany, NY

Abstract: A teacher of the visually impaired gives her views on career options for people with visual impairments. She tells how she and others with visual impairments did not let well-meaning counselors keep them from following their passions, and reminds us all to keep a "can do" philosophy.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, low vision, blind, visual impairment, career options, vocational rehabilitation

Editor's Note: The following article originally came as a response to a query on AERnet about whether a person with low vision should even contemplate a career as a pharmacist. Often families are not sure how to think about their child's future, as it can be hard to envision a future career in some fields if there are not many role models available. We hope that this article provides one framework for future planning.

I am by no means an expert on the subject of a pharmacist's duties or working conditions, but it is my understanding that more and more prescriptions, especially in a hospital setting, are done on computer networks rather than in doctors' chicken scratching. So a blind person would have

access to accurate information about the medications and dosages needed through the use of a screen reader or screen enlargement program, just as we have access to information needed to perform other jobs. I wouldn't eliminate this career out of hand, just because it has historically in-

involved trying to make sense out of illegible handwriting.

Besides, sighted people also have great difficulty deciphering doctors' handwriting, and many mistakes are made in filling prescriptions by fully-sighted pharmacists for this reason, as well as for other reasons. There must always be quality control and checks to ensure the accuracy of medical procedures. And it is partly because doctors' handwriting has always had the reputation of being so bad, that other methods of communicating this important information to the dispensing pharmacist are being developed and implemented nowadays. So perhaps visually impaired people who wish to enter the pharmacist career will benefit from these changes, which are being made to improve the quality of the services provided by sighted pharmacists to healthcare customers.

In fact, I am acquainted through the Internet with a person who is currently a pharmacist and who is severely visually impaired, and that person has agreed to consult with the aspiring pharmacist. I don't know just how she does her job, but who am I to say that she, or another visually impaired person, cannot do it well and safely? So, I, for one, will let those with personal experience advise one with the desire to follow the pharmacist career path, rather than dismissing the plan out of hand, simply because I lack the "vision" to "see" how it can be done safely and efficiently nonvisually.

I think we who work with young blind and visually impaired people, whether we ourselves are blind or sighted, are too quick sometimes to limit the career choices of our students based on what we think or feel is possible or practical, or on what we feel we ourselves would be able to do successfully without sight. But I grew up knowing a totally blind boy who as a teenager wanted to become a mollusk biologist. He was told

by some authorities that there was no way that he could do the shipboard ocean research required, and many obstacles were placed in his path. But he had the will and the passion within himself which could not be denied, and he got his Ph.D. in record time and has gone on to become an authority in evolution studies, written important books in his field, and won the MacArthur "genius" award. And he found ways to do the ocean-based research as well as everything else that the educational program and the job required. The field would have been poorer if he had heeded the warnings of rehab counselors and other "experts".

When I was in college I was interested in studying the Chinese language. I too was told that this field was "too visual"—how was I going to read all those thousands of tiny Chinese characters? But I was fascinated by the language, and so I ignored the obstacles and thought, well, I'll just give it a try and see what I can do. And I went on to get my Masters Degree in Chinese language and Asian Studies and enjoyed living for 5 years in Asia and teaching Chinese language at the college level when I came back to the U.S.

This doesn't mean that any young blind person can succeed in any career just because he/she has the desire to do so. But, I think the question we should ask is, if this student were fully sighted, would he/she have what it takes to successfully pursue this career? If so, then I would not want to capitulate to blindness as the limiting factor in a career choice. If the person has the intelligence, interest, drive, creativity, and whatever other qualities are possessed by non-disabled members of the profession, then I will bet that that person will find a way to reach her/his goal and follow her/his passion.

Sometimes realism is just another word for handicapping our blind young people more than their lack of eyesight does.

Keys to Driving with Low Vision

By Dawn Adams, Vision Consultant,
Region 8 Education Service Center, Mt. Pleasant, TX

Abstract: The author shares her strategies and suggestions as a driver with low vision.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, low vision, driving, training, expanded core curriculum

In my roles as a VI professional and as a low vision driver, I am often asked by parents and other VI professionals about driving. Here are my answers to the questions I am frequently asked.

HOW DOES A PERSON FIND OUT IF HE OR SHE WILL BE ABLE TO DRIVE?

The process should begin with a low vision evaluation. The student will be evaluated to see if the residual vision is sufficient for driving and for use of Biotopic lenses. If the student is a candidate for driving, as determined by the low vision evaluation, then the doctor will complete a form that the student can take to the driver's license office. This form will exempt the student from the vision test that is typically done as part of routine licensing. Once the Biotopic device is purchased and arrives at the doctor's office, the student will need to schedule an appointment to have the glasses adjusted. Once the glasses are obtained, the student can take the road test at the driver's license office. Upon passing the road test, the student will be issued the appropriate driver's license for his or her age group with restriction "P", to wear "mounted telescopic lenses." Other restrictions may also be given depending on the eye condition and other factors.

WHAT IS THE VI TEACHER'S AND O&M SPECIALISTS' ROLE IN THIS AREA?

The VI team should consider if there has been appropriate instruction in the use of distance devices, and provide services to ensure the student has gained these skills.

Once the necessary direct instruction has been provided, the VI professionals should know whether the student regularly uses hand-held telescopes or other prescribed low vision devices without the need for prompting by others. The TVI and COMS should always be "in the loop" when it comes to low vision evaluations. When the topic of driving arises, and it will if the student thinks he or she is a candidate, the TVI and/or COMS should communicate with the doctor about the student's use, or lack of use, of the prescribed devices. My personal opinion is that a student must regularly and efficiently use a telescope on his or her own to be a successful driver with low vision.

My own experience in school was that I always used my low vision devices. One of these was a pair of glasses with a very small mounted telescope. I could use it for near or distance. Using a telescope became as easy as walking or breathing to me. Because of that, I believe the transition from sitting at a stationary desk in the classroom to controlling vehicle was much smoother than it would have been if I had not become accustomed to using such devices. It's not just about being able to use a telescope. It's not just about being able to physically drive the car. It's about the ability to combine and coordinate both of these sets of skills to be able to drive.

O&M instruction in residential and business travel helps students gain an understanding of intersections, traffic flow, traffic rules, and many more concepts and skills that are directly related to driving. Learning

about how to formulate an alternate route also has a direct connection for the student when it comes to driving. Sometimes he or she will need to plan different routes for different times of day because of the location of the sun. Instruction in use of public transportation is also vital for students who may be candidates for driving. There are times when it is not safe (or convenient) to drive, and some sort of public transit is a good alternative. There are places that I do not feel as comfortable driving as I do in others. When I must travel to these locations, I utilize the bus. Even students who will live and drive in rural areas need to develop these skills, so that when they go to urban areas they will have options in places they do not feel comfortable driving. Also, having students use their devices to locate numbers on businesses and houses, rooms in the school, etc. provides good practice that will help them in driving. Both TVIs and COMS can provide instruction in use of the distance devices.

WHAT ABOUT ACCIDENTS? BEING PULLED OVER?

In the event of a car accident involving a driver who has low vision, everything is the same as if both parties had “normal” vision. The officer is going to ask to see the driver’s license of both drivers. If the person with low vision was wearing his or her device when the accident occurred, and was not found to be at fault or in violation of any other laws (e.g. seatbelt, speed, etc.), then no ticket is issued and nothing is said about the person’s vision being a factor in the accident. Let’s just say that if the device was not being worn, things would be much worse for the individual.

WHAT ABOUT DRIVER’S EDUCATION?

It is good for everyone to have Driver’s Education. However, it is more difficult for a student with a visual impairment to be successful in typical driver’s education course. This is partly because the student

is having to learn to coordinate the use of the device and learning to control the vehicle at the same time. Sighted students are only having to learn to control the vehicle and the rules of the road. There are driving instructors for persons with visual impairments and other disabilities. These tend to be quite expensive, costing more than the typical tuition for driver’s education.

CAN A PERSON WITH LOW VISION BE A “GOOD” DRIVER?

Yes. As with other things, the unique characteristics of the individual will have a huge impact on driving ability. If an individual is well coordinated physically, then this will be evident in driving. If a person is easily distracted, this could also be true with driving. Confidence is also a big factor. When I began driving I was not very confident, but was over-cautious. Now as a much more experienced driver, I remain cautious, but I am more relaxed and confident.

Drivers with low vision must remain focused on the task of driving, not pay attention to things that are not pertinent at the time (shouldn’t everyone!) Students need to understand that driving is not something that is for everyone. I count it a privilege to drive—even though at times I may ask others to drive for me, take a ride when it is offered, or use public transportation.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The following websites may be useful:

<www.biopticdriving.org/AOA.htm>

Bioptic Driving Network. This website provides information about the low vision driving population, laws, etc.

<www.lowvisioncare.com/visionlaws.htm>

Low Vision Care. This website provides information on driving requirements for each state as well as other resources for people with low vision.

TAPVI Talks

By Michele Chauvin, TAPVI President-Elect, Sugar Land, TX

Abstract: Members of the Texas Association for Parents of children with Visual Impairments, a statewide parent group, participate as stakeholders in a public meeting for a state rehabilitation agency. TAPVI sponsors parent training at Texas Focus 2008.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent organization, parent support, parents of children with visual impairment, parent training

On January 15th, I learned at the TAPVI board meeting that DARS was considering a waiting list to address some of its funding and caseload issues. A public meeting to hear comments was scheduled for January 29th, two weeks later. As the president-elect of TAPVI, my family recognized the importance of this opportunity so I quickly made plans and traveled alone to Austin.

During the meeting, DARS staff shared their proposal to create a waiting list for the Blind Children's and Independent Living programs. Everyone listened while DARS stakeholders—TX consumers, families, and groups—expressed their concerns about a waiting list. DARS stakeholders asked questions and made comments about how much these programs meant to them. Some parents traveled for hours that morning just to attend the meeting and to share their DARS experiences.



Alma Granada, TAPVI Treasurer, gives her perspective:

I am a mother of a 10 year old with a vision impairment and I am very grateful for the assistance he has received from DARS. When I was advised that DARS was considering implementing a waiting list for services I immediately made calls to ask what could be done to overturn this action. To my amazement I was told that a parent's voice could make a big difference and that

I might consider getting a group of parents together to attend the public meeting held in Austin. I shared this information with the VI Family Leadership class and four of us made plans to attend the meeting.

I left from Brownsville at 3:00 a.m. to pick up the other mothers in Harlingen that were driving in from Edinburg and Mission along with the mother in Harlingen. As we were driving to Austin we were talking and reviewing the changes DARS was considering. The whole way we each kept saying that we were not going to get up and talk; we would just be there for support and to make a presence. We arrived at the meeting just as it was about to start. As the meeting progressed and we heard the proposal being presented, we felt so overwhelmed with emotions. I decided that I could not just sit there and not tell my story. I gathered my courage and turned in my request to speak and after I did, two of the other mothers turned in their requests also. We encouraged each other, and one by one we went up to speak, voice our concerns, and tell our story. It was the most rewarding feeling.

The panel was so impressed and moved that after the meeting we had several people that were at the meeting approach us to congratulate us and to assure us that we had made a big impact. We were so excited and filled with emotion we couldn't stop talking about

it all the way back. We heard a few days later that we had made such an impression that DARS had reconsidered and was seeking other alternatives.

Once I returned home, I was willing to do whatever necessary to help the DARS Division of Blind Services Children's and Independent Living programs not only survive, but thrive. These much needed programs offer various services to their consumers, our children. Our family has not personally received many direct services from DARS, even though our daughter is totally blind. However, we know the value of this agency to other TX families with children who are VI. Currently, DARS continues to work, seeking solutions and assistance both internally and beyond for current and future budget and staffing concerns. The stakeholder relations page on the DARS website, <www.dars.state.tx.us/stakeholders> offers communication and information about issues relevant to VI consumers and families. Undoubtedly, the Texas families who sacrificed their time and energy this January made an impact.

TAPVI, along with other Texas VI families, offers our sincere appreciation to the DARS-DBS staff statewide. Thank you to the Blind Children's and the Independent Living specialists and staff who work tirelessly assisting TX families. Your efforts with our children are essential and meaningful, and we are grateful for all you do. Thank you to those who work on a statewide level planning and administering the BCP and IL programs. We appreciate that you provide opportunities for TX VI families to be meaningfully involved in the process of these important programs, from holding public meetings, to listening to stakeholders concerns, to creating a website for open communication with stakeholders, and beyond. Texans with visual impairments have a brighter future than ever before, and DARS-DBS has played an integral part in this. Thank you!

This leadership experience was invaluable, as I gained new understanding and insights into public policy making. For every door that is open and every road that is paved, someone has gone before us and made a way. Now it is our turn to knock on doors and build new roads.

STATEWIDE FAMILY TRAINING

TAPVI was proud to sponsor a pre-conference for parents in conjunction with the 2008 Texas Focus conference at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin. The event, that was held June 16, 2008, featured a special keynote by Susan La Venture, Executive Director of NAVPI (National Association for Parents of children with Visual Impairments). TAPVI hosted a luncheon at the hotel, and parents had several opportunities to connect with other families.

Olga Uriegas, TVI/COMS from Region 11 ESC in Ft. Worth presented a session in Spanish to parents seeking information about the special education process. The afternoon session topics included Adapted P.E. for visually impaired students including those with multiple disabilities, Active Learning, and Describing the World to your child. The speakers were: Randy Foederer, Adapted P.E Consultant for Region 10 ESC; Vicki Mason-Foederer, Adapted P.E. Consultant for Dallas ISD; Laurel Hudson, TVI/COMS, DeKalb County Schools, Decatur, Georgia; and Sara Kitchen, TVI, TSBVI Outreach Specialist.

Editor's note: TAPVI is planning a family conference to be held in Austin next year. The conference will be in collaboration with Texas Parent-to-Parent at the Omni South Austin. Save the dates: June 26-27, 2009.

To read more about how advocates and DARS-DBS worked together for positive change, read Barbara Madrigal's article in News & Views (page 25) describing the recent progress DBS has made in enhancing the Blind Children's Program.

Becoming Empowered Through Self-Determination Skills

By Debra Sewell, Curriculum Coordinator, TSBVI

Abstract: At the heart of everything we want to teach our children lies a set of skills that helps them become successful members of our communities. The author describes how family members and educators can foster self-determination in children and young people with visual impairments.

Keywords: blind, visually impaired, self-determination, personal empowerment.

Self-determination is more than social skills, and it is more than self-advocacy. For some students it might be as simple as indicating choices and preferences, and for others, as complicated as determining future careers. Self-determination has been described as “The ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself” (Field and Hoffman, 1994). Some of the major components of self-determination are:

- knowledge of self and others
- personal management
- effective communication
- self-advocacy and advocacy within systems
- decision-making
- goal setting
- problem solving

Professionals in the field of visual impairment have realized that self-determination skills must be explicitly taught. Studies have confirmed that students with disabilities are often unable to advocate for their own needs, wants and desires and are less prepared to make the hard choices and decisions needed to take control of their own lives and become self-determined adults (e.g., Wehmeyer, 1993; Wehmeyer and Kelchner, 1994).

A common goal we all share for our children is for them to enjoy the high-

est possible quality of life. Therefore, we need to offer the instruction, encouragement and experiences that will allow them to become as self-determined as possible. People who are self-determined purposefully cause things to happen in their lives.

We need to offer instruction in self-determination to all students at all functioning levels. This means we:

- start early with choice-making and hands-on experiences
- teach and re-teach from pre-school to high school
- incorporate this instruction into daily activities

Self-determination skills must be taught over the course of a lifetime. They must be integrated into a variety of daily activities, and must be refined over time. Becoming self-determined is not a short-term process



that can be packed into a few years. It is an undertaking that is never complete; an undertaking that we should work on our entire lives.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Knowledge of Self and Others

- Give your child opportunities to have a wide variety of experiences so he/she can discover likes and dislikes, and strengths and challenges.
- Expose your child to a wide variety of foods, toys and clothing styles in order to increase knowledge of the world and to develop preferences.
- Offer structured choices such as a choice between two breakfast foods, two shirts, or two toys so that your child can develop preferences, and exercise personal control.
- Give your child information about what other people choose (and why they make those choices if that information is known).



- At least once a week, allow time for your child to experience an event from beginning to end (e.g., washing dishes, making the bed, reading an entire passage in print or Braille instead of listening to part of it on tape).
- Help your child create a list of strategies when he/she is faced with a challenge.
- Help your child find ways to record the things he or she discovers such as preferences, strengths and values (e.g., tactile symbols, Braille, tape recorder).



- Create an "All About Me" book that travels and grows with your child throughout the school years. As your child matures, guide him or her to notice changes, trends and patterns in the book.
- Encourage your child to dream about the future. What will he or she be doing in 1 year...5 years...10 years? Remember that dreams do not have to be as practical as goals, and don't worry if they are unrealistic.

- Make sure that your child has chores, responsibilities, and deadlines. These things will help him or her to develop a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth, preferences, and knowledge of personal strengths.
- Provide structured opportunities for your child to offer genuine help to others.

Personal Management

- Label emotions that are being expressed by you, your child, and others. Describe the facial expressions and/or actions that are used to express the emotions.
- Help your child identify indicators of stress (e.g., feeling angry, having an upset stomach, feeling helpless, clenching fists or jaw, tightening and lifting shoulders, feeling upset without knowing why).
- Help your child identify causes of stress (e.g., too much stimulation, change, difficulty communicating needs and wants, feeling a lack of personal control, feeling overwhelmed, feeling pressure).



EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

- Help your child develop a variety of coping strategies to use in times of stress or anger (e.g., taking a break, listening to music, physical activity).

- Teach your child to pay attention to the ways in which others respond to him or her.

Effective Communication

- Teach your child to face the person he or she is communicating with.
- Teach your child to communicate wants, needs and opinions without being aggressive or pushy.
- Teach your child to be sensitive to the messages communicated in tone of voice and body language.



Self-Advocacy & Advocacy within Systems

- Teach your child to take turns. From an early age, children need to know that all people need attention, help, entertainment, and a chance to play. Turn-taking helps your child consider others, and also understand that he or she deserves a turn and equal opportunity.
- Teach your child to communicate a specific request when asking for help. Making a polite request is a valuable skill. Making it specific defines the role of the helper and leaves overall responsibility and control with your child (e.g. I need help putting toothpaste on my toothbrush vs. I need help).
- Teach your child to persevere (e.g., keep trying, look for alternative methods).

Decision-Making

- Teach your child the difference between making choices and making sound decisions.
- Make sure your child has at least one opportunity a day to make a meaningful choice (e.g. clothing, food, playtime activity, etc.).
- Structure decision-making opportunities for your child, and allow him/her to make mistakes.
- Make a shared decision with your child helping him or her list the pros and cons of the options.

Goal Setting

- Allow your child to see you setting and achieving daily and long-term goals.

- Guide your child in setting one simple daily or weekly goal (e.g., independently brushing teeth, saying "thank you," finishing homework).

Problem Solving

- Help your child become aware that everyone has problems (children often believe only they have problems).
- Teach your child to recognize when there is a problem, and whose problem it is to solve.
- Teach your child a simple problem-solving strategy such as SOS: S=State the problem; O=Options; S=Solution

CONCLUSION

There are many opportunities for children to practice self-determination skills each day. Children with visual impairments or deafblindness need to move and choose and do. They need to be actively involved in, rather than passively moved through, life. Active participation and some degree of choice in their daily routines form the beginnings of self-determination. Experiences that include decision-making, prob-



lem solving and goal setting are essential next steps. These experiences provide the necessary context for purposeful intervention and instruction in self-determination

skills. By providing experiences, instruction, and access, we can help our children grow into empowered adults who lead satisfying lives.

Let's Play

By Jill C. Brown, M.Ed., CTVI/COMS, Crowley ISD, Crowley, TX

Abstract: Young children learn through play. The author describes practical ways to turn everyday items into learning experiences by encouraging play.

Key Words: Effective Practices, early childhood, play, ECI

Many times friends and other teachers ask me what I do with children age birth to three? My answer is always, "I play." I enjoy looking at their faces in response. I choose those words for two reasons. First, you cannot ever have a sit-down teaching lesson with such a young child. Second, I absolutely love what I do. As I try to teach or expose the kids to new skills, I know I learn as much they do.

It is through play that children learn about themselves: the space around them; their environment; the relationships of objects to themselves; and their ability to move out and explore. Notice the key word—*themselves*. Children cannot begin to learn about the world around them until they understand themselves first. With infants this is done incidentally through movement and vision. With diminished or no visual input, an infant needs support to learn about the world beyond what his or her body is touching. This means parents, teachers, developmental specialists, or anyone involved in that child's daily life must teach the baby about space outside the immediate area. Look at the social interactions between a parent and child. Parents spend time playing with their babies, not teaching structured "sit down" lessons. It is in this back-and-forth play that children learn about themselves—how they move and im-

pact the world. Through accidental motion, children learn how to move and coordinate their arms and legs to obtain toys. We must provide lots of opportunities for children to explore, and repeat those actions and experiences. Some important ideas to consider are:

- Every child can learn
- All behavior has meaning
- All children want to move
- Children learn from their own play activities

So we begin with play. I start by looking at what the child's day looks like. When is the child most alert? I try to learn about the child's likes and dislikes. Families are great resources to provide this information. Start with activities the child enjoys and motor abilities that the child currently has. From this starting point we encourage the child to have the confidence to move and progress from there.

Since movement is a natural and important part of a baby or toddler's life, let's begin by considering some early movements.

HEAD CONTROL

One of the first motor movements a baby learns is head control. The child learns to

keep his or her head upright and at the center of the body. The infant can move his or her head in a variety of ways, with each having a different effect. This skill is a foundation for future movement and sitting.

Activities to encourage head control

- Hold the baby in many different positions during the day, not only over your shoulder. Also hold the child in front of you, or put the child in a “football” hold (hold the child horizontally).
- As you hold the child in your lap, slowly put him or her into a frontal or prone position, as well as a back or supine position. Also try a side-lying position.
- For older infants, hold them in a supported sitting position, then slightly move them off center to encourage the righting reactions (movement of the head and arms to get back to center and protect self). This also works well using a ball.
- While the child is lying on his or her back, gently pull the arms toward you, helping the child to a sitting position while giving the child time to adjust his or her head.

Toys to encourage head use

- Rattles
- As appropriate, lighted toys
- Sound or musical toys

TUMMY TIME

Another important motor experience, tummy time helps the child begin to separate movement between different parts of the body. Tummy time is one of many beginning activities that help develop motor planning along with muscle development. It is also a pre-cursor to crawling.

Activities to encourage play when lying on one’s tummy

- Lying on different surfaces.
- Place favorite toys at various intervals for the child to discover. Use of sound may encourage the child to reach out.
- Play mats.

Toys to encourage spending time on the tummy:

- Objects which incorporate favorite color, texture, sounds
- Musical toys that activate with a swipe (i.e. Happy Apple)
- Shiny, reflective toys (mirror, Mylar paper)
- Lights that push on and off

ROLLING

Rolling helps the child learn that we move from one position to another.

Activities to encourage rolling

- Roll the child in a blanket or towel (like a hot dog) and help him or her roll out of it.
- Help the child roll to a wall, then away, then to find wall again (to kick or pat).
- Use various textures (e.g., a textured mat or blanket) to experience different feels.

Toys to encourage rolling

- Lighted toys
- Musical toys
- Shiny or reflective toys

CRAWLING

Crawling helps coordinate weight shift from one side of the body to the other. It teaches balance, fosters muscle development, and strengthens muscle tone.

Activities to encourage crawling

- Encourage child to rock on all fours.
- Crawl over a variety of obstacles and textures.
- Crawl in and out of small spaces (e.g. under a table, tents, boxes, etc.)

SITTING

Sitting is an advanced skill for the baby. It incorporates posture and balance skills. Muscle strength is needed to be upright. Motor coordination allows the child to use different parts of the body for different jobs, freeing his or her hands for play.

Activities to encourage sitting

- Place baby in or on a variety of play spaces (i.e. boxes, mats, pillow, ball).
- Encourage the sitting child to reach up above, to left or right side, and forward, then to regain upright posture.

Toys to encourage sitting

- Toys that bang (e.g., wooden spoon and pot)
- Toys that encourage use of both hands
- Soft books (turning pages)
- Toys that encourage understanding of cause and effect (e.g., baby pushes button and music plays)

STANDING

Standing helps the child to learn balance and maintain posture, developing muscles and strength. When standing, the child explores shifting weight from one side to the other, a skill needed to facilitate walking.

Activities to encourage standing

- Placing interesting toys or activities on low or child size tables.
- Have child stand on your feet while you move (sway, side step, walk, dance, march, etc.).

Toys to encourage standing

- Toys that have movement involved (busy boxes, pounding balls etc.)
- Musical toys
- Formboard puzzles

WALKING

Activities to encourage walking

- Walking in mom or dad's shoes.
- Games to encourage movement (e.g. walk like an animal, Simon Says, Ring Around the Rosey, etc).
- Cruising along furniture, rails, or walls to get someone or something.
- Dancing

Toys to encourage walking:

- Push toys; sit and ride toys
- Wood beam (2X6 board)
- Music

Children who move and explore will have more opportunities to acquire more information. It is through all this moving in space that the child can begin his or her learning career. Play activities, whether planned or unplanned, create natural opportunities for incidental learning.

Toys are a natural extension of the child's play. Toys help encourage imaginary play and role-play, while fostering social and conceptual development. While there are many, many commercially developed toys, it is fun every now and then to make your own toys. Home-made toys as well as the commercial toys should be used with adult supervision to avoid misuse or choking.

The following chart includes some of my ideas for toy play. You may already have many of the materials on hand. Most are easily found in a variety of stores.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES	
<p>Wristband</p> <p>Materials Needed: ponytail holders; bells/beads/paper etc.</p> <p>Fill ponytail holders with textured filling. Sew tightly. Put on child's wrist or ankles. This will help with body awareness. Supervision required.</p>	<p>CD Stack</p> <p>Materials Needed: CDs, small dowel rod; string/yarn.</p> <p>Stack CDs on rod or thread horizontally on string; hang CDs as a mobile, decorate with reflective stickers or contact paper.</p>
<p>String of Beads</p> <p>Materials Needed: Christmas beads; girls' play beads; Mardi Gras beads.</p> <p>Visual tracking; reaching; use of both hands (on resonance board beads make lots of noise with very little movement).</p>	<p>Measuring spoons/cups/bowls</p> <p>Materials Needed: metal/plastic measuring spoons/cups.</p> <p>Comparing sizes; stacking/nesting; clacking together for noises (good for "Little Rooms"); scooping & pouring.</p>
<p>Pet Squeak Toys</p> <p>Materials Needed: various soft squeak toys (pet section).</p> <p>Visual tracking; auditory tracking; grasping.</p>	<p>Crinkle paper</p> <p>Materials Needed: Mylar paper (found in gift wrap section).</p> <p>Easy to hold; makes lots of noise with little movement; high visual interest.</p>
<p>Boxes, cartons, plastic bottles, plastic containers</p> <p>Materials Needed: milk cartons; shoe, cereal, or oatmeal boxes; film canisters; plastic milk jugs; margarine tubs; etc.</p> <p>Homemade rattles; scent jars; matching tops to jar/container; stacking/nesting; suspend for mobiles.</p>	<p>Tissue boxes; shoe boxes</p> <p>Materials Needed: pop-up tissue boxes or shoe boxes with lids; different textured items to put in.</p> <p>Feely boxes to stick hand in and find various items. Good for language and concept development.</p>
<p>Single color or simple patterned material</p> <p>Materials Needed: material from any craft store .</p> <p>Cover bottles to enhance visual use; cover side of playpen or board to hang contrasting toys over. Make bean bags using favorite color/pattern and fill with interesting items (marbles, beans, rice, etc.).</p>	<p>Cookie sheet and magnets</p> <p>Materials Needed: cookie sheet, baking pans; magnets (vary shapes and sizes).</p> <p>Note: supervise this activity so child does not swallow magnet. Many cookie sheets or baking pans are magnetized. Stick magnet to sheet to hold items. Encourage visually or tactually finding item or magnet. Teach various concepts: up/down; left/right; corner, etc. by moving magnets.</p>

<p>Plastic soap holders; scrubbers; drain stoppers</p> <p>Materials Needed: items come in many different shapes, textures, and sizes.</p> <p>Encourages finger exploration; comparisons; good “chewy” for infants (please wash and supervise activity).</p>	<p>Ice cube trays/muffin tins/egg cartons</p> <p>Materials Needed: various sizes of ice trays, muffin tins &/or egg cartons.</p> <p>1-to-1 correspondence, matching; same/different number concepts.</p>
<p>Aluminum bowls</p> <p>Materials Needed: all sizes-found in dollar stores.</p> <p>Resonates sound, stirring; filling & dumping; sound echo.</p>	<p>Clips</p> <p>Materials Needed: hair clips, clothespin; paper fasteners.</p> <p>Development of sorting and pincer grasp.</p>
<p>Rattles (large)</p> <p>Materials Needed: clear soda containers with screw top; glitter, bells, shiny beads; other items of interest.</p> <p>Fill container partially with items to use (i.e. bells, glitter, beads, confetti) and glue top shut. Great for auditory and visual use.</p>	<p>Rattles (small)</p> <p>Materials Needed: toothbrush holders; small travel bottles; various items to put in (beads, beans, rice, etc.).</p> <p>Small hand-held rattles for child to play with. Fill container with items and glue shut. Decorate outside with stickers or reflective tape. Please supervise this activity.</p>

Most of these ideas are not new but are natural. The trick is to use your imagination and let the child guide you as to what they want for that day. Now go out and play. Enjoy!

WEBSITES WITH GOOD INFORMATION

“Learning Through Play with Homemade Toys”, Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind <www.asdb.state.az.us/ecfe/projects.html>

“TotsnTech: different ideas and toys to make for play, communication and mobility/positioning”, <www.asu.edu/clas/tnt/home_files/i_play.html>

“Inventory of Purposeful Movement” by Tanni Anthony <<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/purposeful-movement-inventory.pdf>>

“Motor Activities to Encourage pre-Braille skills”, <www.tsbvi.edu/Education/pre-braille-motor.htm>

“Learning to Move—Moving to Learn (A Guide to Gross Motor Activities for Children of Varying Abilities)”, <www.iidc.indiana.edu/edd>

“Creating Educational Toys and Activities for Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired”, <www.tsbvi.edu/Education/activities.htm>

“Almost 100 Motor Activities for Infants and Toddlers” by Olga Uriegas, <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/summer01/motor.htm>

“Orientation and Mobility Resource Site”, <<http://orientationandmobility.org>>

Cafeteria Life

By William "Bill" Daugherty, Superintendent, TSBVI

Abstract: Bill Daugherty, Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, describes students' viewpoints expressed at typical meals in the TSBVI cafeteria.

Key Words: News & Views, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, TSBVI, Superintendent Bill Daugherty, blindness, visual impairment, cafeteria

I was asked to write about my observations and conversations that occur when I eat with the students in the TSBVI cafeteria. School cafeterias have always been major icons of the school experience, lived and then relived time and time again with tales of mystery meats, broccoli and the many characters who seem to be their most interesting selves during those 30 minutes of relatively unstructured time. But having recently gotten off the plane from Nigeria where I visited a school for the blind and saw kids walking a dusty, rutty and caneless half mile three times a day for a small bowl of grain and tuber based mush, I'm about ready to start force feeding the broccoli back here at home. I kid, but just a little.

Enough about the adjustments I have to make now that I'm back on Texas soil in the Land of Plenty. The table I sit at when I'm able to make it to the cafeteria is usually populated by the same two or three teens, with another two or three who come and go as the mood strikes. When I'm there I'm mostly a listener who asks a few opened ended questions from time to time about food, music, the bus rides home, favorite teachers/subjects and the like. I also spend a lot of time just looking around the cafeteria at how kids and kids and kids and staff interact. The TSBVI cafeteria is actually a very pleasant place operated by a friendly staff serving up food on par with any of the many school lunches I have eaten over the years. The instructional staff sits among the students giving assistance as needed and otherwise just having a low-

key presence that gives the overall feel of a big family dinner.

What I have picked up from talking with students is that they all have a very personal set of needs and interests that reflects their family life and upbringing as well as their individual awareness of being a person with a disability. Some seem to view themselves significantly through the lens of their handicapping conditions—others seem to care less about how they are labeled or which body parts work well and which don't. All really do seem to care a great deal about how they are thought of by the adults around them. Says one girl: "I can't wait to tell Mr. So-And-So about the grade I made in math!" Says one boy: "Wait until you see me in my suit tomorrow--you won't even believe how good I'm going to look!" A few kids in the cafeteria might be a little more surly and disaffected in their manner, but I suspect they are all desperately looking for validation from the adults around them.

These kids are also funny as all get out, and every chance to eat with them is going to bring some laughs. Today a boy with no vision did a spot-on physical impersonation of a popular social studies teacher, and acted truly surprised when I asked him how in the world he knew about the mannerism. Says one boy: "Mr. Daugherty, I don't have a pen—can I borrow yours for the afternoon?" Says I: "This is a superintendent's pen with very special powers. If you had it you might sign something that lets school out early". Says the boy very seriously and

somewhat offended: "Well, I have a pen at home that is so powerful it's used by the military, and it could kick your pen's tail." So, I held on to my pen, but it now it sits nervously in my pocket. The barbecue on

a bun and mac-n-cheese seemed to hit the spot for everyone and folks were generally in good spirits with a couple of hours left before a long weekend.

The Status of Services in the Blind Children's Program

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

Abstract: this article discusses the most recent activity relating to policy and programmatic changes for Texas children who are blind or visually impaired

Key Words: blind, permanent severe visual impairment, wait list, stakeholders, Blind Children's Program, Division for Blind Services (DBS), Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Health and Human Services, Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT), Texas Association for Parents with Visually Impaired Children (TAPVI), Texas CHARGERS, Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER), Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT)

In the past six months, parents, families, and DBS partners from across the state have expressed great interest in services available in the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program. They have attended stakeholder meetings and contacted legislators regarding pending changes in program policy that would have directly impacted services to young Texans who are blind or visually impaired. I am happy to bring you an update on the status of the Children's Program.

As you know, the Children's Program historically has faced resource constraints and high caseload sizes. In the fall, we implemented purchase restrictions in the Blind Children's Program and I discussed those restrictions in the fall issue of *Texas Sense-Abilities*. Although these restrictions partially addressed the resource constraints, it did not provide relief to our Specialists with large caseloads. To address this concern, we began working on a rule change proposal to present to the DARS Council that would allow the Children's Program to develop procedures for a Wait List.

It was this proposal that generated the most feedback from our stakeholders.

During a public forum in November, our consumers and stakeholders challenged us to identify alternatives that would not impact parents of newly-diagnosed children. In December and January, we teamed up with stakeholder representatives to develop a sound methodology for determining optimum caseload size and to identify options to address resource and caseload size issues. The participants of these workgroups identified several Wait List options but, following consumer and stakeholder feedback during another public meeting on January 29, 2008, it was determined that none of these options would be selected at this time.

Instead, DBS management submitted an emergency request for increased funding. In addition to the funding of purchased services for our consumers, our request included ten new specialist positions in order that we could achieve optimum caseload size and improve the quality of services. Our emergency funding request was presented to Health and Human Services Commissioner Albert Hawkins in February, and we were notified on May 30 that the request was approved!

Let me say, the Blind Children's Program has been buzzing with activity this summer. We have never before had this many new Specialists start at once, and we have been very busy making preparations! The ten new specialist positions have been posted, interviews held, office space created, supplies and equipment ordered, training plans developed, and travel preparations made. We are eager to welcome our new staff on board and introduce them to our consumers and families as quickly as possible!

But also let me say: our commitment to the Blind Children's Program does not stop here. We will continue to analyze current and future needs, and to plan for those needs through the LAR process. You can continue to obtain updated information in the stakeholders section of the DARS website <www.dars.state.tx.us/stakeholders>, and please feel free to contact Ignacio Madera, DARS Stakeholder Relations Specialist, at <Ignacio.Madera@dars.state.tx.us> or at 512-377-0596.

And last (but not least), I would like to express our gratitude to our consumers and stakeholders who have worked with us during this process, including the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT), Texas Association for Parents with Visually Impaired Children (TAPVI), Texas CHARGERS, Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER), Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association (DBMAT), and the ARC of Texas. And a particular shoutout to TAER representative Edgenie Bellah, Texas CHARGERS president Cathy Springer, and AVIT president Marty Murrell for the time and energy they invested in this process. And my heartfelt thanks to the many parents and stakeholders who came to our public meetings, some of them driving through the night and dealing with Austin morning traffic to get here. Your interest, your support, and your passion have inspired us, and I assure you that we will work diligently to continue to earn your support and collaboration.

Free Braille Book Bags from National Braille Press

Excerpt from National Braille Press website:
<<http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/readbooks/index.html>>

Abstract: National Braille Press provides a bag of free braille materials and parent resources for current and future braille readers ages birth through seven and who reside in the U.S. or Canada through ReadBooks! Because Braille Matters program.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, braille, literacy, National Braille Press,

ReadBooks! is a national children's braille literacy program to encourage families with blind children to read print/braille books together. ReadBooks! objectives are:

- To foster a love of books and reading at an early age;
- To expose parents of preschool blind children to braille as an effective method of reading and writing;
- To encourage parents to learn just enough braille to help their child;
- To introduce visually impaired children to a means of reading independently;
- To prepare parents to advocate for braille instruction when their blind child enters school;
- To promote an early expectation of personal achievement through literacy.

National Braille Press, along with Seedlings Braille Books for Children, is distributing attractive braille book bags to families with blind and visually impaired children,

ages birth to seven, across the country. The distribution process is a collaborative effort with educators and early intervention professionals. Each bag contains:

1. An age-appropriate print/braille book for three age groups: birth-3, 4-5, and 6-7 in English or Spanish;
2. A braille primer for sighted parents entitled *Just Enough to Know Better*;
3. A colorful print/braille place mat;
4. Print/braille bookmarks;
5. *Because Books Matter*, a guide for parents on why and how to read books with their young blind child;
6. A gift coupon redeemable for another print/braille book or braille/large print playing cards;
7. Print/braille magnetic letters.

The Participants in the program agree to:

- Identify children who are potential braille readers, birth to seven, and their families;
- Personally deliver the book bags or supply us with the mailing address for identified families in their state;
- Help us to evaluate and improve the program.

Substantial grants from Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation, Mellon Charitable Giving Program/Alice P. Chase Trust, and others enable us to produce and distribute these book bags at no cost to the families or to the participating professionals. Currently, funds support the distribution of bags to 7,200 families in identified states across the country.

Finding a Provider: new book announcement

Excerpt from Autism Asperger Publishing Company website
<www.asperger.net/bookstore.htm> on *A "Stranger" Among Us*, by Lisa Lieberman

Abstract: This is an announcement for a book on how to find a one-to-one provider for a child or young adult with disabilities.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, disability, Lisa Lieberman, A "Stranger" Among Us, child care

Hiring one-to-one providers to support your child is not work for the faint of heart, but finding the right person is worth every bit of effort involved. And *A "Stranger" Among Us* shows you how. Based on years of personal experience, research, and interviews with parents and providers, Lisa Lieberman has written a one-of-a-kind book that demystifies what could otherwise be an overwhelming task - finding the best one-to-one support for a child or young adult with disabilities.

Using examples, checklists, and sample

questions, Lieberman creates a framework from which a family can assess its needs and core values before moving forward with the recruitment, hiring, training, supervision, and retention of quality one-to-one support and respite care that best fits its needs. Obtaining care for loved ones is a critical process, and *"Stranger"* covers a complex topic with sensitivity and understanding.

For more information about the book, *A "Stranger" Among Us*, by Lisa Lieberman, visit <www.disabilityinthefamily.com>.

Announcing: Special Education Record Keeping Folder from PACER

Website Excerpt from the Pacer Center <<http://www.pacer.org>>

Abstract: Record keeping folder available from PACER helps organize school papers.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, special education, parent support, PACER,

PACER Center has designed a Special Education Record Keeping Folder to help keep track of important school papers. The large, expandable folder contains seven individual, attractive, and informative folders. Each folder contains tips on helping children suc-

ceed in school while also helping parents store important records.

The cost is \$10 each and you can get the order form through this link: <www.pacer.org/publications/specedrights.asp>.

Publications from the Delta Gamma Center

Excerpts from the Delta Gamma Center Website <<http://www.dgckids.org>>

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, Delta Gamma Center, child development, siblings

The Delta Gamma Center for Children with Visual Impairments has these books available on their website.

IN TOUCH WITH YOUR BABY'S DEVELOPMENT, BY JO RUSSELL-BROWN, M.ED.

The shock of hearing that your baby is blind is a feeling that lives long in the hearts and minds of those parents who experience this news from their doctor. "In Touch With Your Baby's Development" is a booklet written for parents of infants and young children diagnosed with significant visual impairments. Inspired from 29 years of experience, this booklet will provide parents hope and guidance beyond the diagnosis and will become a valuable resource as their baby grows.

BEYOND THE STARES: A PERSONAL JOURNAL FOR SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

Beyond the Stares was written by a group of children and young adults from St. Louis, ages nine to fifteen, with brothers and sisters who are blind or visually impaired, many have other disabilities as well.

Beyond the Stares is a collection of their stories, and their messages to other brothers and sisters throughout the country who have a sibling with a disability. These young writers came together through a sibling group sponsored by the Delta Gamma Center for Children with Visual Impairments. Their dream was to share what they know about growing up with a brother or sister with a disability.

Throughout the process, they learned about themselves and their families. At the end of each chapter, there is a page for readers to write their own stories. The young authors are: Tyler Adolphson, Marissa Baker, Paul Fields, Kathryn Jacob, Lauren Jacob, Emily Sartorius, Mac Slone, Elizabeth Vaughan and Rachel Vaughan.

Excerpts from the Chapters:

Pride: Each of our brother's and sister's successes makes us proud and gives us hope that other people will learn what we already know — that our siblings are worthy of respect and love just like people without disabilities.

How Others React: It seems that many people cannot see beyond our siblings' differences to what makes them special. One advantage of growing up with a sibling who has a disability is that we may be more accepting of differences than most people.

Guilt: We understand that raising a child with disabilities is a big job, and we are proud when we can help ease our parents'

loads. But sometimes, the job is almost too big for us.

Responsibility: We have more responsibilities than many other kids our age. While it can be a drag, it can also be a source of pride. Our parents trust us with extra responsibilities and give us an opportunity to show them what we can do.

Read This To Me!

Excerpt from ReadThisToMe.org <<http://readthistome.org>>

Abstract: This article describes a free service that allows blind and visually impaired people to have printed documents read to them over the telephone.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, free reading service

ReadThisToMe is a free reading service for blind and low-vision people, powered by volunteers and Internet collaboration.

ReadThisToMe allows blind and low-vision people (clients) to have printed documents read to them over the phone. All a person needs is a phone line and a fax machine (no computer is required.) Here's how it works:

1. The client faxes the document to be read to the ReadThisToMe toll-free fax number: 1-877-333-8848. The first page of the fax needs to be a cover page that includes the client's first name and callback (voice) phone number. The document itself can be just about anything: a handwritten letter, a bill, a can of food, a multi-page magazine article -- just about anything that can be faxed.
2. One of ReadThisToMe's volunteer readers will call the client back—usually within an hour—and read the document.
3. That's it!

The service is available throughout the U.S. and Canada and is absolutely free (though donations are gladly accepted).

Because the reading is done by people, this service can handle documents that electronic reading hardware and software cannot, such as handwritten documents, documents with complex graphics, etc. The cost of entry is just a phone line and a fax machine. A flatbed fax machine is slightly more expensive but can be more versatile, allowing clients to fax pages from books, food containers, and other thicker items.)

ReadThisToMe needs more volunteer readers: all volunteers need are a few minutes a day and willingness to make a long-distance phone call. More info about volunteering.

The service was created and is maintained by Savetz Publishing. Businesses that wish to help sponsor ReadThisToMe can send e-mail to info at <<http://readthistome.org>>. Sponsors and other friends of Read This To Me are listed here.

Family Connect Brings Together Parents of Visually Impaired Children

Press Release, American Foundation for the Blind, April 29, 2008

Abstract: This article describes the new FamilyConnect resource that provides support and information for parents with children who have a visual impairment.

Key Words: News & Views, blindness, visual impairment, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI), FamilyConnect,

When parents learn their child has a visual impairment, it can be overwhelming. Parents wonder, "Will my child fall behind at school?" or "Will my child make friends?" or "Will my child have a successful career?" With only 93,600 visually impaired school-aged children in the U.S., over half of whom have additional disabilities, it's easy for families facing vision loss to feel alone.

To help these families connect with each other and give busy parents, grandparents and other caretakers a place to find comprehensive resources and support 24 hours a day, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) today launched FamilyConnect™, an online, multimedia community for parents and guardians of children with visual impairments.

Located at www.familyconnect.org, FamilyConnect gives parents access to message boards where they can talk to other parents, compelling videos featuring real-life families, parenting articles, a mom-authored blog, a glossary of more than 30 eye conditions, and links to local resources. The site also features sections dedicated to multiple disabilities, technology, education, and every age group from infants to teens.

"We created FamilyConnect to give parents the support and information they need to ensure their children can achieve their dreams—whether that is playing sports or music, learning to read braille, getting a

first job, surfing the web, making the cheer-leading squad, traveling the world, or going to graduate school," said Carl R. Augusto, President & CEO of AFB.

A recent NAPVI/AFB survey of parents of children with visual impairments showed that parents/guardians turn most commonly to physicians (82%), educators (76%), and web sites (65%) for information and support regarding their children's vision problems. This is consistent with national statistics from the 2006 Pew Internet & American Life Project that show 80 percent of American adult Internet users have searched for health information online. For parents living in rural areas with fewer resources, the web is particularly important to finding relevant, trustworthy information and the right services.

"When I talk to parents of visually impaired children, they almost always ask about three things: they want to talk to other parents who have children with the same eye condition as their child, they want access to the latest health and education information, and they want to know what the future holds," said Susan LaVenture, Executive Director of NAPVI. "FamilyConnect offers parents all these things—and more—in one place."

In addition to joining a community of parents, visitors to www.familyconnect.org can create a personal profile and receive information on news and events based on their child's age, eye condition, and loca-

tion. Families can also find articles written by parents and professionals on topics such as:

- Finding the Right Eye Care Professionals for Your Child
- Developmental Milestones: What Do They Mean?
- Your Child's Individualized Educational Program
- Friendship in the Teen Years
- College Life Begins

In designing this web site, AFB and NAPVI partnered with leading national organizations and hundreds of local agencies that

serve children who are visually impaired to keep FamilyConnect content complete and up to date. AFB and NAPVI also solicited input from families across the country.

The goal of www.familyconnect.org is to provide connections and support. By providing accurate information and creating a forum for meaningful discussion, families and their visually impaired children will feel empowered to reach their full potential.

FamilyConnect is generously supported by grants from the Lavelle Fund for the Blind, Inc. and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Morgan Stanley.

Added by ARDs? Here's a Popup You'll Like.

Excerpt from National Center on Severe and Sensory Disabilities website:
<<http://www.unco.edu/ncssd/resources/popup.shtml>>

Abstract: This article describes a popup guide available on the web to help parents of visually- or hearing-impaired children advocate for their child's educational needs in ARD meetings.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, National Center on Severe and Sensory Disabilities, special education, IEP, ARD

With the help of parent organizations across the country, the NCSSD <<http://www.unco.edu/ncssd/index.shtml>> has developed a series of disability specific help guides for parents, teachers, and administrators. Each one includes a series of commonly heard objections followed by some possible responses and the law that justifies those responses.

The Pop-Up IEP <<http://www.unco.edu/ncssd/resources/popup.shtml>> is intended to help parents respond to school administrators who can sometimes have priorities that are not clear to parents. As such, these tools provide administrators with the information they need to petition local school boards for the funding necessary to help each child reach his or her full potential.

The Blindness and Visual Impairment version provides information specifically intended to help parents, teachers, and administrators deal with the issues specific to students who are blind or have a visual impairment.

The Deafness and Hard-of-Hearing version provides information specifically intended to help parents, teachers, and administrators deal with the issues specific to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Significant Support Need version provides information specifically intended to help parents, teachers, and administrators deal with the issues specific to students who have some highly debilitating disability.

Volunteer's Needed for our 3rd Annual Texas Charger's Retreat

Press Release from Texas Chargers

Abstract: Texas Chargers is seeking volunteers for their annual family retreat in September.

Key words: Family Organization, volunteer, retreat, CHARGE Syndrome

WHO WE ARE

We are a group of Texas families, friends, and professionals who are dedicated to helping children and young adults who live with Charge Syndrome. The primary function of our organization is to support the emotional and educational needs of the people with Charge Syndrome and the families and professionals working with them. We help provide and access information specifically from the state of Texas to these families.



big hoe-down party. This retreat provides a stress free environment for families to connect with others touched by CHARGE Syndrome, so they can share the joys and challenges of raising someone with special needs.

WHAT IS IT?

A day of FUN!! A weekend camp retreat with activities, speakers, good food, and a

Each CHARGE child requires one-on-one volunteers to make the retreat a success!

Families take home new information specifically about children with disabilities living in Texas, and CHARGErs get to meet others like themselves. Children of all ages will break into groups with volunteers to enjoy exciting activities throughout camp. This year we will have several breakout groups including



a parent panel, father's forum, grandparent's group, moms chat & sib shop. We will end the day with dancing & smores at the hoedown. We started in 2006 with just over 20 families; last year we had over 130 family members and 22 Grandparents. Participating CHARGErs have ranged from six months to twenty-two years old. Families who attend the Texas Chargers Retreat join the extended family where together they can face the future.

WHERE IS IT?

The Texas Lions Camp in beautiful Ker-ville, TX <www.lionscamp.com> includes a pool, petting zoo, nature walk, a sports lake, putt-putt golf, ropes course, & more.

WHEN IS IT?

September 12 & 13, 2008. We need volunteers for Friday evening from 3pm-9pm, Saturday 8am-9pm, or anytime in between. There is a mandatory volunteer information meeting on Fri. at 3pm or Sat. 7am. You can volunteer for both days or for only part of a day, as long as you can participate in the Orientation and let us know your availability.

WHY DO THIS?

To Help CHARGE Syndrome Children & their families have a day of support. There is nothing that compares to seeing a child smile because they've learned a new skill or achieved a goal in a new activity. Your role consists of making sure each camper is embracing the Texas Lions Camp experience, staying safe and having a great time. Most staff will partner with a CHARGEr and their family, serving as their big brother/sister through the camp experience. Some staff will work together to care for our infants and toddlers so that

their families can attend special learning and networking sessions. Some will help with special activities such as Movie and Pizza Night on Friday or the Saturday night Hoe-down. You need not be a professional to volunteer, but we welcome those who work with special needs children or think they might like to. You won't get this kind of experience anywhere else!

OPPORTUNITIES

Nursing Care, Day Care, One on One w/ Charger, Signing Interpreter, Spanish Interpreter, volunteer for various activities



CONTACT US

To volunteer or find out more, contact:

Donna Arthur, Volunteer Coordinator
<donna.arthur@yahoo.com>
(469) 713-4394, or

Cathy Springer, President
<dacspringer@austin.rr.com>
(512) 255-3176

CHARGE—Children Have Always Reminded us of the Goodness in Everything!

National Braille Association: Ask an Expert

By Kathy Geiger, TVI and VI Specialist, Region 5 Educational Service Center

Abstract: This article provides information about the National Braille Association.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, braille, National Braille Association, NLS certification

National Braille Association (NBA) is the national organization for Braille users in North America. It was originally composed of volunteers who provided Braille material for blind people. The changes in NBA have been varied and not only benefit those who have NLS certification, but all teachers of the visually impaired. Over the years, NBA has realized that Transcriber and Educator Services have become a big issue. Therefore, there is an additional committee for this group. I enjoy attending the meetings not only to learn all the new rules, but to

also learn better ways of presenting materials for my students. Even if you were not able to attend the NBA conference in Dallas in April, be sure to check out the NBA website at <http://www.nationalbraille.org/>. One especially helpful feature is the Ask an Expert section, which is divided into topics and moderated by experts in tactile graphics, mathematics notation, computer assisted transcription, foreign language, and many more. This is a great way to get very specific and current information.

Website Information: The Better Hearing Institute

Excerpt from The Better Hearing Institute website: www.betterhearing.org/about/

Abstract: this provides a review of the Better Hearing Institute website

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, deafblindness, hearing loss, stigma,

The Better Hearing Institute (BHI) is a not-for-profit corporation that educates the public about the neglected problem of hearing loss and what can be done about it. Founded in 1973, we are working to erase the stigma and end the embarrassment that prevents millions of people from seeking help for hearing loss, to show the negative consequences of untreated hearing loss for millions of Americans and to promote treatment and demonstrate that this is a national problem that can be solved.

To achieve these objectives, we:

- Use the media, our web site and other communications forums to give the facts about hearing loss and promote
- Produce and disseminate educational materials (Request Hearing Loss Guides).

better hearing. For example, thanks to BHI, nearly 60 Hollywood celebrities, sports personalities, business leaders and other noteworthy Americans have come forward to share their stories about hearing loss and how they have addressed it (Check out Celebrity Circle in this web site). Since 1973, BHI public service announcements have appeared in many key print publications (e.g. Newsweek, Time, Fortune, JAMA) and on all major television networks.

- Do authoritative research on the incidence of hearing loss, the benefits of treatment, the consequences of ignoring it and related topics.
- Operate a call center for consumers who have questions about hearing loss. (Call 1-800-EARWELL.)
- Reach out to health professionals through our Continuing Medical Education program, in order to help physicians better recognize the signs of hearing loss and work with patients to find solutions.

We believe this nation needs to stop treating hearing loss as a minor problem. Research shows that this condition, when

left untreated, reduces earning power, disrupts family life and causes a wide range of psychological problems. The good news is that, these days, effective solutions for hearing loss are available for people of all ages. As digital and programmable technologies have revolutionized the world of medical devices, we have seen the dramatic benefits that hearing aids now provide to the hard-of-hearing.

Whether you are a person with hearing loss, care about a loved one with a hearing loss or are a medical professional, BHI invites you to spend time on our website, learning more about hearing loss and its treatment: <http://www.betterhearing.org/about/>

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

Texas Fellows

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters



Texas Fellow

- Mary Beth Bossart
- Judith Nugent
- Debbie Louder
- Dalia Reyes
- Peggy Burson
- Mary (TeCe) Stark
- Elizabeth White
- Terry Gaines
- Terry Gaines
- Diane Sheline
- Brenda Jackson
- Anita Pineda
- Susan Butler
- RosaLinda Mendez
- Brenda Snow

Candidate

- Kristin Preston
- Jennifer Orenic
- Pam Yarbrough
- Rachel Sepulveda
- Heather Dyer
- Vanessa Perkins
- Linda Washburn
- Cindy Harber
- Monica Campbell
- Monica Johnson
- Lisa Gray
- Alma Soliz
- Julie Moyer
- Carolyn Metzger
- Alice McCollum



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

BulletinBoard

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

Texas Chargers
Third Annual Retreat



September 12th-14th 2008

3rd Annual

Texas CHARGERS Retreat

Sept. 12-14, 2008

Texas Lions Camp, Kerrville, TX

Texas Charger's Retreat is a weekend camp experience for the whole family in the beautiful Texas hill country,

Friday Night – Welcome, Registration, State Agencies Introductions, Dinner and Movie.

Saturday – A day of FUN...Children of all ages will break into groups with volunteers to enjoy exciting activities. The site includes a pool, petting zoo, nature walk, a sports lake, putt-putt golf, ropes course, & more.

LEARNING...Our speaker Dr. Tim Hartshorne, professor of psychology at Central Michigan University, has spoken numerous times at national conferences and written articles on behavioral issues in CHARGE. Most importantly he has a 19 year old son with CHARGE. Come learn from his professional & personal experience with CHARGE Syndrome.

and SUPPORT...We will have several breakout groups including a parent panel, father's forum, grandparent's group, moms chat & sib shop.

We will end the day with dancing & s'mores at the hoedown. This weekend is full of opportunities to visit with many professionals, families & individuals with CHARGE Syndrome & learn from their life experiences.

Sunday Morning – A light breakfast followed by checkout.

This retreat is provided free of charge to families, including all meals and snacks. Travel assistance is also available for families to cover the cost of gas. Accommodations are provided for families at no charge. PLEASE BRING ALL BEDDING & SUPPLIES

PROFESSIONALS may attend for a \$50 registration fee (payable with check to Texas Chargers, INC). This includes Saturday's meals and activities.

Volunteers Needed!!!! See the article on pages 32-33.

For information about Texas CHARGERS visit <www.texaschargers.org>, or contact Cathy Springer 512-255-3176 or Molly Roberts at 469-774-9921

The Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas



36th Annual Family Conference "DBMAT – We Have a Voice: See Me, Hear Me"

**October 10-12, 2008
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 on-site childcare available for your children with disabilities and their siblings.** Children have their own planned activities for fun, separate from the adult learning sessions and activities.

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

The conference registration form is available online at: <http://www.dbmat-tx.org>.
Click on DBMAT Annual Conference Registration-2008.

The Christian Knapp Memorial Golf Tournament

September 25, 2008

Friendswood, TX

Benefit for DBMAT's mission to promote interveners in Texas

For information and registration go to www.dbmat-tx.org

For more information, please contact:

Steve at 512-336-7859

Positive Connections Line: 432-264-6780

Introduction to the Intervener Team Model

September 26-27

DoubleTree Guest Suites, Houston, TX

Texas Deafblind Outreach presents this introductory training for new interveners in Texas, accompanied by at least one additional member of the educational team.

For information, contact: Brian Sobeck, 512-206-9225 or briansobeck@tsbvi.edu.

Envision Conference 08

A multi-disciplinary low vision rehabilitation and research conference

September 5-6, 2008

Westin Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX

The Envision Conference is a multi-disciplinary low vision rehabilitation and research conference. Every year, hundreds of professionals in the low vision rehabilitation field come together to advance the state of the art in low vision rehabilitation. CEUs available through COPE, ARBO, AOTA, ACVREP, CRCC. Registration is \$525.

Attendees include: Ophthalmologists; Optometrists; Occupational Therapists (OTs); Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRTs); Orientation & Mobility Specialists (COMS); Low Vision Therapists (LVTs); Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs); vision researchers; and advocates for people who are blind or visually impaired.

For information contact Michael Epp,
<michael.epp@envisionus.com> or
316-425-7119

<<http://www.envisionconference.org/>>

10th Annual

**Virginia Sowell Center
Distinguished Lecture Series**

October 24-25, 2008

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

English/Philosophy Bldg., Room 001

This year's keynote features Ella L. Taylor, Ph.D., Associate Research Professor in the Teaching Research Institute at Western Oregon University, presenting on the impact of cochlear implants on people who are deafblind or hard-of-hearing. Also, Dr. Roseanna Davidson will provide training on the Functional Hearing Inventory, an observational instrument used by professionals to observe children's behaviors and responses to sound in the environment. The training will validate the FHI protocol training manual and activities. Attendees will learn how to administer the FHI tool and measure environmental sounds. The training is free to the first 40 who register.

For further information contact Robin Rekieta at (806)742-1997 ext. 251, or <robin.rekieta@ttu.edu>, or go to <<http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/>>.

Addressing the Needs of Students Labeled Deaf and Low Functioning, At-Risk or Deafblind

November 20-22, 2008

Houston, Texas – Intercontinental Houston Hotel next door to the beautiful Galleria and hundreds of beautiful shops, restaurants and tourist attractions.

This will be our fifth conference, bringing people together from across the nation to address the unique needs of persons who are deaf or deafblind and have additional challenges to reaching their life goals.

Presenters will include Dr. Bobbie Beth Scoggins, Dr. Greg Long, Dr. Neil Glickman and Dr. Mike Kemp. With an expected 500 attendees, this will be an opportunity to acquire new skills, network, and learn from those who work directly with this population, exchanging ideas, strategies and resources.

For registration materials, contact Theresa Johnson at tjohnson@esc4.net.

Come to Houston to learn, shop for the holidays and network with others.

HKNC National Training Team (NTT) – 2008 Seminar Schedule

“Transformation”

Person-Centered Approach to Habilitation

September 22–26, 2008

This seminar will provide tools to utilize the PFP Mapping Process to design a functional program based on consumers’ preferences. Registration Deadline – August 22, 2008.

“The Magic of Technology”

Adaptive Technology Training for Teaching Deaf-Blind Individuals

November 17–21, 2008

This seminar demonstrates the technology and methodology for teaching a wide variety of adaptive equipment to consumers, whether they are beginners or advanced. Registration Deadline – October 24, 2008.

All seminars held at the Helen Keller National Center in Sands Point, NY. CEU credits available. Cost: \$500 includes lodging, meals, professional training and manual.

For more information contact: National Training Team (NTT)
Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths & Adults (HKNC)

141 Middle Neck Rd.

Sands Point, NY 11050

Phone: (516) 944-8900 Ext. 233/239

TTY: (516) 944-8637

E-mail: ntthknc@aol.com

<http://www.hknc.org/FieldServicesNTTSchedule.htm>

Register on-line at our website: <https://www.hknc.org/Application.htm>

2009 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness

February 13-14, 2009 in Austin

Look for details this fall.

Parents and Other Family Members: Are You on the List? Texas Visually Impaired Family Network listserv

This list is designed exclusively for families of children with visual impairments that live in Texas. Here is your opportunity to connect with other Texas families, sharing experiences, ideas, joys and concerns. This list is intended to provide a place to get support, information and resources.

To subscribe send an email to <txvifamily-subscribe@topica.com>.

For information about the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) go to <www.tapvi.org>.

Questions? Contact Jean Robinson at 512-206-9418 or <jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>.

TX SenseAbilities

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<www.tsbvi.edu>

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TSBVI Outreach
1100 West 45th Street
Austin, Texas 78756

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

Deadlines for Submitting Articles
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