

TX SenseAbilities

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

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What happens when a high school letter winner is a braille reader and a good self-advocate? Well, she gets a letter jacket with her name in braille. Read how a determined student athlete, her school, and a letter jacket company worked together to create a unique jacket. The story starts in "Family Wisdom" on page 2.

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

The Letter Jacket Story

By Stori Brown, Parent, Emory TX, and Donna Jones, Deputy Commissioner's Office,
DARS Division for Blind Services

Abstract: A mother shares her daughter's experience in working with a company to have her name brailled on her letter jacket.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, braille, athlete, self-determination, public awareness

Charlotte Brown, a gifted high school athlete, made the Rains High School (RHS) Varsity Cross-Country team last fall and earned a letter jacket as a freshman. Like other students who are recognized for their achievements, Charlotte was awarded the prestigious letter jacket. Charlotte is a freshman, an accomplishment all by itself. Charlotte also is the only one in her high school who happens to be legally blind.

That difference makes Charlotte unique, and her letter jacket is unique, too. Her mom Stori Brown, a science teacher at RHS, would like to share her daughter's experience with *TX SenseAbilities* readers.

RHT Athletic Director Jeff Lester (pictured with Charlotte) informed the athletes that a representative from the letter jacket company TSRP would be at the school, and told the eligible athletes to place their orders. Charlotte asked if it would be possible to speak with the representative privately, as she had a question for him. Her request was honored, and the two met.

Charlotte introduced herself and thanked him for meeting with her. Charlotte then asked the TSRP representative a question. "Can you stitch my last name in braille?" Before he could answer her, she went on to say to him, "I may never be able to see the patches I earn on this jacket, but I would like to be able to read my last name on it." The representative, never having met Charlotte, was unaware that Charlotte was visually impaired. He paused for a few moments, smiled, and then said, "We have never had this request but, Charlotte, I believe TSRP is about to make the first letter jacket in braille." Charlotte made the braille pattern, and the representative took it with him.

The jacket was stitched just like all the other athletes' jackets; the only difference is it reads "BROWN" across the back in braille, instead of script. It is the first braille jacket ever produced by TSRP and possibly the first ever produced by any letter jacket company.

The TSRP representative informed us that when Charlotte's jacket was being stitched in the factory, the workers kept coming over and looking at it. They wondered about the meaning of all the round chenille dots. When they realized it was braille for a child's last name, they cried. While TSRP employees had an emotional response to her disability, Charlotte herself has a different response, which is determination.

Charlotte's jacket arrived at school in a large box. Along with many others, we were anxious to see what it looked like. Most importantly, the TSRP representative wanted to be sure it was correct. Charlotte's cross-country coach, Denise Yankie, and I unpacked the box and found her jacket. The only way for us to check if it was correct was to ask Charlotte.

We found her, sitting at a table doing homework after school. Coach Yankie approached her and placed it into Charlotte's hands. Charlotte was so excited and she said, "Oh, my goodness, is this my jacket?" Charlotte took it out of the plastic wrapping, ran her fingers over the chenille dots, grinned, and said, "It's perfect!"

In an article published in a local newspaper, Charlotte shared, "Everyone has their own challenges. It kind of makes you a strong person because you don't have to really sit back and say you can't do something."

Her attitude toward challenges made Charlotte the perfect choice to be a motivational speaker at the 2012 National IBM Conference, which will follow the theme "Face Your Challenges." This August Charlotte will share her story with approximately 600 IBM executives from across the United States when they meet in Addison, Texas.

How many 14-soon-to-be-15-year-old girls do you know that have been asked by IBM to make a motivational speech for their national conference? Well, you know one now!



Photo caption: Charlotte Brown and Rains High School Athletic Director Jeff Lester show off her unique letter jacket.

Living Life to the Fullest

By Alison Brown, Parent, Houston, TX

Abstract: A mother describes her daughter's accomplishments and her determination to be part of the community. Her disabilities and chronic health condition are challenging, but she does not let that hold her back from running.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, track, running club, visual impairment, disabilities, kidney transplant, Girl Scout award, Joubert Syndrome.

Madison Celeste Rickerl, soon to be 18 years old and an incoming senior at TSBVI, has a heart of gold. In spite of many difficulties in her life, she has worked hard to make a fantastic life for herself and serve as an inspiration to others, both peers and adults without disabilities alike.

Madison has Joubert Syndrome, which causes her to be legally blind, have ataxia and mild physical disability, deal with some sensory issues, and resulted in kidney failure when she was younger. She received a kidney transplant in March 2003 from her mom, Alison Brown, and then Madison got PTLD (post-transplant lymphoproliferative disease) cancer. She went through many surgeries and chemotherapy and was finally pronounced in remission in March 2004. Ever since, Madison has worked hard to regain some lost skills and become more fit over time, in spite of physical difficulties and effects of immunosuppressant medications.

In her younger years, Madison was included in many regular classes in her local elementary and junior high schools, with some special education classes, and some pullouts for services. She generally did well in her classes, but often struggled with bullying and peer pressure in junior high, which was very hard for her. She struggled without appropriate technology and services, and without



many friends. She has been very happy attending TSBVI since her freshmen year, making many friends, improving her skills, maturing, experiencing many new opportunities that were not available to her in her home school, and finding real friends who accept her and appreciate her. While attending school in Austin during the weekdays, Madison chooses physical activities during her after school time and does not waste much time on the couch. She has

participated in the TSBVI track team and in the "Sports Extravaganza"

Photo caption: Madison with victory arms, running across finish line with other participants at her fun run.

program for students with visual impairments, has been on the pep squad, and has participated in a year-long exercise program called “360”. Coach Joe has been an inspiration to Madison, and has encouraged her to participate in many outside activities with Team Vision. Also, Mr. Pierson has been a wonderful resource for Madison as well. Madison served as an oompaloompa in the TSBVI school play “Willie Wonka” last May.

On the weekends when she is home with her family, Madison trains for races, lifts weights, and participates in many 5k’s, some 10k’s, and has completed two half marathons. While many people can easily complete a half marathon in 3 hours, Madison does so in 5 hours, working hard the whole time. She requires sighted guide while training and during races, and is very grateful to those who have helped her achieve her dreams. Madison completed her first half marathon in Austin’s Decker Challenge Half Marathon last December, supported by her mom Alison Brown, step-father Buddy Brown, and sister Meglyn Rickerl. Madison’s family was all there again with her when she completed her second half marathon in Seabrook’s Lucky Trails event in March 2012, guided by Hung Nguyen and Kanae Ishihara. Many friends from the running club ran in with her to the finish, and many people were touched by the sight!

Madison would like to be an example to others who have had kidney transplants and other health impairments that they, too, can live active, healthy lifestyles. To that end, Madison and her planning committee organized a 1-mile fun run last March and provided participants with presentations and information on transplants and how to become an organ donor. She also earned her Girl Scout Gold Award in the process.

Madison was recently nominated by the board of the Clear Lake Fitness Club for the honor of having the “marathon trail” named after her this year. Madison and her family are residents of Clear Lake, and have been members of CLFC for two years. She was nominated by someone in the running club

who does not know her well, but has been very inspired watching her work so hard at races. The family team shirt that Madison and her team wear at races says “Believe in Yourself” on the back, and many other runners find inspiration seeing Madi and her message.

Madison has come a long way in her quest for health and fitness. With the help of loving friends and family, and amazing community support, Madison is living life to her fullest!



Photo caption: Madison and family standing behind her sign naming the Marathon Trail after her.

Skydiving Takes Fitness Club to New Heights

By Ellen Grimmett, Editor, *The Spectacle* TSBVI, Austin, TX

Abstract: The author shares the sky diving experience a group of students recently had as part of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Fitness Club.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, recreation leisure, sports

Editor's Note: The following article was featured in The Spectacle, Spring 2012 edition. The Spectacle is the newsletter for parents of students who attend the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Comprehensive Programs.

Students taking part in the year-long TSBVI Fitness Club were surprised and thrilled when they discovered their end of the year trip would include jumping out of an airplane.



Twenty high school students, along with school staff, including the Fitness Club Sponsor, Eric Cobble, traveled to San Marcos, Texas on April 29, 2012 and jumped out of a plane from over 10,000 feet.

Before the jump, students and staff slipped on their jumpsuits and harnesses and met their instructors. After being primed for their jump, they loaded the plane; tightly attached to their individual instructor.

Initially, the 120 mph free fall was notably loud and windy. After about 30 seconds, the shoots opened and gave way to almost total silence and blissful acceptance for the next five minutes.

TSBVI Residential Director Shelly Allen, who was one of the first to jump, recounted her experience as one of those once in a lifetime moments that forever changes you as a person.

Juan Garcia, a TSBVI student who also jumped said, "Sometimes, the best thing to do to get over your fear is to not think about it. I don't think about it. I just do it."



Photo captions: (Left) A TSBVI student and his skydiving instructor jump from a plane near San Marcos, Texas ; (Above) The student and his instructor safely landing after their tandem skydive.

Visions of Success: Turning Passions into Careers

Featured in the DARS, Division for Blind Services Annual Report

Abstract: The stories of three young adults who inspire and encourage us with their professional success.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, career, self-determination, role models, mentoring, success stories

Sara Nichols: Continuing Her Career with Help from DARS

Sara Nichols, 31, is a speech therapist from Atlanta, close to where the borders of Arkansas and Louisiana meet Texas. She is legally blind as a result of macular dystrophy, a rare, genetic eye disorder.

Sara works in several schools in Cass County. She came to DARS for assistance with job retention when her vision loss caused her to have difficulty completing her job duties. With help from DARS, Sara kept her job.

DARS Field Specialist Stacey Sewell guided Sara through an array of low-vision services, including Braille instruction, orientation and mobility training, and assistive technology purchases.

A video magnifier helps Sara access print material. Magnification software enables her to complete reports and assessments. Orientation and mobility training allows Sara to travel around her schools independently with her cane. She also learned Braille and can make special Braille labels for her file folders. Sara has used all the services provided by DARS to continue her career as a speech therapist.

“I would not be where I am today without your help,” Sara told Stacey. In fact, Sara told a story about how she was able to complete tasks when her non-disabled coworkers literally were left in the dark.



*Photo caption:
Sara Nichols*

“When the electricity went out at school, some of the teachers were frantically trying to get around the school and figure out some way to be productive,” Sara explained. “All the teachers were standing in the hallways because they couldn’t really do anything else. After about 30 to 45 minutes in the dark, I came out of my classroom and was headed to the front office. Some of the teachers stopped me and asked what I was doing in my room. I told them that I was organizing folders and reading.”

“They all appeared pretty confused, so one teacher said, ‘How are you getting anything done with no lights?’ I responded to her by saying, ‘Well, I was using Braille. Who’s disabled now? Not me!’” said Sara.

“One teacher told me that was the first time she realized that there are times when completely ‘normal’ people are disabled. She said she never had considered that there may be a time or a situation when a person with a disability is more ‘abled’ than she is.”

Sara continued, “And personally, this was the first time in my ‘disabled’ life that I could do more than someone who was not disabled!”

Velia Garcia: Moving Forward with a Local Network and DARS Services

Velia Garcia of Baytown has an artist’s touch when it comes to adapting materials to meet her students’ individual needs. She studied graphics and design and can communicate her ideas to students who are blind or visually impaired.

As a fourth grader, Velia was diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a rare inherited disorder characterized by deafness and progressive vision loss. She started receiving DARS services as a young girl to help her get the support she needed throughout her education.

In high school, Velia became interested in design. She later enrolled at Texas State Technical College (TSTC) in Waco to pursue an associate’s degree in drafting and design technology. As one of her final projects, she designed a building to be used by the Waco Zoo to house flamingos.

When Velia returned to live with her family in Baytown, she didn’t know where to turn. Being recently divorced, this definitely was a new beginning in her life. She tried to remain positive, but with limited community resources and transportation, she was not sure how to move forward. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Pat Foster and Deafblind Specialist Jackie Souhrada helped Velia direct her job search.

“As we got to know Ms. Garcia, it became obvious she was highly creative. She showed us her art work and photography,” Jackie said. “She kept mentioning her high school teachers from Goose Creek Independent School District (GCISD) and expressed her gratitude for their support over the years.”



*Photo Caption:
Velia Garcia*

Pat worked with Velia on her resume to better reflect her interests and encouraged her to visit her teachers to learn if there were any opportunities in GCISD. Based on her knowledge of graphics and design and her ability to communicate in sign language and in writing, GCISD hired Velia to convert printed material into Braille. She also helps teachers adapt their lessons for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Velia is clear about one thing: she got this job herself by networking with people in her own community who knew and cared about her. “I’m a very focused and serious person. I’ve always been motivated to try a variety of experiences. I’m not the kind of person to give up,” she said.

And what would she tell another person with a disability?

“Go for it! DARS helped me and will be there to help you with a variety of services and job opportunities.”

Julio Castillo: Living a Dream and Drawing a Paycheck

Everyone strives to find their dream job, and Julio Castillo of Fort Worth has “cooked up” his dream—literally. Legally blind since birth, Julio is a chef at the prestigious Hyatt Regency at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW). The hotel is described as offering “a superb combination of impeccable service and outstanding amenities.”

Julio first came to DARS through the Blind Children’s Program and later transitioned to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program for help with his career. Although he knew he wanted to be a chef, he didn’t know how to accomplish his goal since he was unable to drive and had no formal training in culinary arts.

Due to his low vision, Julio had trouble reading print, travelling, and seeing recipes, temperature settings, and dials on kitchen equipment. He also had trouble arranging for job accommodations or even talking about his disability to an employer.

DARS helped Julio begin his culinary arts studies through Hyatt’s Hands on Education program at the Hyatt Regency at DFW. This is how Julio was discovered by Hyatt Executive Chef Mark Rowston, who invited Julio to apply for a job at the Hyatt. Rowston worked closely with Julio and VR Counselor Elizabeth El Aiady to determine the kitchen accommodations necessary for Julio to be successful.

Julio was provided with low-vision assistive devices and technology. He also received mobility training on how to travel to work every day via public transportation.



*Photo caption:
Julio Castillo*

Now Julio is seizing opportunities, meeting challenges, living life confidently, and drawing a paycheck. DARS helped Julio gain confidence in himself and his abilities. Julio works full time at the Hyatt Regency at DFW as an entry-level chef. His boss said that he would love to have more people like Julio and that he is “a competent and enthusiastic employee, a cooking natural, and an asset to the kitchen.”

Recently, Elizabeth stopped by the Hyatt to check on Julio and he told her, “You know, I love my work. It’s worth the trip every day. It’s a real life. Do you know when I got this job, I didn’t know what a benefit was? I was shocked to discover that I have medical and dental, retirement, vacation—they even pay me when I am not here! I never knew what that was. This is more than my job; it’s my career. Thank you for your help.”

Nurturing Thoughtfulness Through The Art of Story Telling

By Judy K. Johnson, Grandmother and Author, Leona, TX

Abstract: The author shares how her grandson with visual impairments inspired her to create Thoughtful Children's Books, a series of beautifully illustrated stories about building friendships and learning from people with disabilities.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, grandparenting, public awareness, friendship, inclusive community, self-determination

The writing muses did not whisper loudly enough for author, Judy K. Johnson to hear and actually start writing until she wore the badge of Grandmother. It was then that the accumulation of parenting experiences began to pop into recollection as her precious grandchildren relived similar adventures themselves.

Until then, she traveled through several careers revolving through accounting, computer drafting, computer graphic design, illustration and web design. So it could be said that she dabbled in many and did not linger long at any without moving onward. All the while, she mainly was focusing on her family and the development of her own children's passions.

The inspiration of the Thoughtful Children's Books project is her grandson, Blake Michael Johnson who was born as a 1 lb. 6 oz. preemie in 2004. Blake has shown such bravery and determination by surviving multiple birth defects and ongoing disabilities including blindness due to retinopathy of prematurity. As a grandmother, Judy's support role has expanded her awareness and appreciation of the ongoing struggles all children with disabilities and their families face just trying to "grow up" as normally as possible. Her initial efforts of gathering ongoing prayers for his survival developed into a website, PrayerForPreemies.com, which still offers prayers and hope to new preemies and their families. Judy's first children's books featured Blake, his blindness issues and how other children can best play and interact with Blake. Her subsequent children's books all carry a similar mission to educate other children in becoming friends of children with disabilities through Thoughtful Children's Books.

Today, Judy has grown in understanding and respect for children living with disabilities. She views herself as a campaigner for her own grandson Blake's disabilities since he was born. Grandma Judy often travels to Austin, Texas from her home in east Texas to spend time staying current on Blake's experiences. She became aware that she wanted to make it easier for children in Blake's gatherings to understand and become friends with one another. She has written five children's books with grandson Blake as the main character.



Photo caption: Judy with Blake

"I believe that all children are born blessed with a beautiful innocence and sweetness that we all eagerly adore. But as they grow, children need our nurturing guidance and support to understand and appreciate concepts of 'thoughtfulness' for one another."

Judy also shares that she has witnessed that a real storybook about a child who is actually in their classroom has enormous powers of encouragement. The kids seem to instantly decide that their friend with special needs is actually a hero and great fun to have around.

Recently, Blake started a new school this year so she was inspired to write, “Blake’s Adventures, A New School and New Friends”.

“All of us in Blake’s family had become familiar with ‘hand under hand’ and I wanted to let Blake’s school friends and teachers learn about it. In order to make it fun, I created a story bag for Kim, Blake’s mother, with enough copies of the books so all the kids could take their own copy home. In the story, a character, Rebecca (a real friend of Blake), does a ‘Show and Share’ in front of the class to demonstrate ‘hand under hand’ using maracas. The teacher then demonstrates with a fuzzy duckling toy. In the story bag of books, I included the same maracas and duckling from the story so the classmates could actually have hands on sharing with Blake after the story is read to them.

Kim called me after she had the story session with Blake’s class. The tone in her voice let me know that this effort had made a real difference to the kids in class who actually lined up to introduce themselves to Blake as the story suggests. This brought me tears of joy to imagine that Blake’s classmates think of him as a hero in the story.”

This “thoughtfulness” nurturing which Judy includes in all her children’s books encourages everyone to participate in making our very diverse world a more fulfilling and inclusive environment for EVERYONE!”

Realizing the immense impact that graphics have on the message of her books, Judy creates her own illustrations with collages of real children’s photographs who are the characters of her stories enhanced with watercolor like image backgrounds. The special impact of the real life identification of the characters helps readers and children admire the heroes of the stories who are real children with disabilities.

Author, Judy K. Johnson, has developed unique methods to create, illustrate, format, upload, proof, publish and print on a small demand scale so that custom personal stories she writes can be made available for any child’s classroom group. For her, to be able to offer this same custom service to others has become a rewarding experience. She welcomes inquiries on her creation of custom “thoughtful children” books.

A favorite children’s song cleverly reminds us all, “When your friend is my friend and my friend is your friend, the more we get together, the happier we’ll be!”

If you are interested in having your own special family story become a “thoughtful children’s book”, Judy accepts inquiries and custom story projects. Visit the custom children’s books section at thoughtfulchildrensbooks.com for more information.

Editor’s Note: We wish to thank the author for granting TX SenseAbilities permission to reprint the following poem, which is published in one of her Thoughtful Children’s Books, Blake’s Adventures: A New School and New Friends.

Understanding Blake's Sight

By Judy K Johnson, Grandmother, Leona, TX

I am blind, but my fingers are my sight,
soft and nimble, carefully exploring, feeling surfaces and textures.
Through my fingers, I see the world around me,
gently guiding me through each experience of my life.

I see warm, comforting, sunlight shining on my hands
as I swing outside in fresh morning breezes.
I see my round, bouncy ball, sometimes jumping back
into my hands when I throw it away.
I see my special book with straight, flat edges
and bending smooth or textured pages, hearing grandma's
voice telling my favorite story over again.
I see my soft, furry lamb with long silky ears,
tickling whiskers, button eyes and fluffy tail,
keeping me company in my bed at night.
I see the most special faces of my mom and dad always smiling.
I see their hair, noses, ears and lips giving kisses,
my favorite, favorite, favorite thing.
I see my puppies' cold, pointy noses and beneath their
wet, scratchy tongues reaching for my cheeks.

My fingers and hands are sensitive even to your touch
With your touch, I anticipate your intentions and emotions.
Friendly and trustworthy, or cautious and nervous.
A heavy touch of insistence without my choice
makes me dread my surroundings and not reach out to see them.
Focused and worried by unexpected, quick movements I feel,
I can become uneasy and unable to trust and very quiet.
Happily, I feel a careful, sincere invitation with your light touch.
Eagerly, I feel each careful movement of your hands beneath mine,
steadily allowing me to trust unknown things you hold to show me.
Your touch can also become for me a welcome, an explanation,
a nonverbal conversation, or perhaps even an invitation for a hug.
Your touch shows me how we can interact and communicate.
Your touch and soothing voice have power to build my confidence
allowing me to see even more unknown things with such a big smile.

Guide me with a steady touch which enables me to direct my own hands.
Encourage me to see all that I can through my fingers.
I will see, observe, explore and have my very own ideas.
My fingers are my sight.

I'd never be able to fix Meredith - do I really need to keep trying?

By Sarah Barnes, TxP2P Volunteer, Austin, TX

Reprinted with permission from *Texas Parent to Parent Newsletter* Volume 11, issue 1, Spring 2012.

Abstract: A mother shares her thoughts about raising her daughter with disabilities. She reflects on the changes when her daughter begins middle school.

Keywords: parenting, disabilities, family wisdom, visual impairment, Dandy-Walker

The irrevocability of it was what bothered me the most. I'd never be able to fix Meredith. She was as stuck with this unfortunate diagnosis as much as I was.

I spent my first year searching for answers and schlepping Meredith to therapy appointments, doctor's appointments and play groups with typical babies and mothers that had no idea what to say to me. Meredith was my first baby as well, so I was doubly clueless.

One time I was at the grocery store with Meredith long before she could walk and an older woman noticed I was carrying her. "You are spoiling her," she said. "She can walk."

"She can't walk," I told her. And of course my thought bubble said: "Did you really just give me unsolicited advice on one of the hardest goals of my daughter's life while deciding between the Honeycrisp and Golden Delicious?"

What a weird planet we live on, parents like us.

Comments like that really ruined my day, but I had plenty of positive karma from support groups and the therapists from Early Childhood Intervention, the statewide program to help families get therapy and other services for their child with disabilities. I've been lucky that the vast majority of teachers and therapists in Meredith's life have been caring, helpful and driven.

Meredith has an unusual diagnosis called Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum meaning the fibers of her brain creating a bridge between the two hemispheres did not form and she has a small cerebellum also due to a Dandy Walker variant. I found a few people to talk to early on who had the same diagnosis for their child, but it's really hard to see into the future until you've walked it.

Everyone warned me about middle school, however, and, man, were they right. It has been an epic struggle to find the social support let alone the best curriculum for Meredith in middle school. I'm not sure where the disconnect was between Meredith's hugely inclusive experience in elementary school and her sudden relocation to an island with few friends and very little exploration off the island unless it was the entire group of Life Skills castaways. She seemed to lose her rights and her social status as an individual.



Photo Caption: Meredith

I guess I turned into the mother from hell when I began writing about all that in the Austin American-Statesman, but I felt the need to open it up. I suppose the biggest lesson I learned is Meredith's education is only as good as the scheduling, which is deeply dependent on how many aides are in the classroom.

I recently helped start a vegetable garden to be shared by kids in regular education and Meredith's classroom. It has been successful and is providing an option to laundering team uniforms and don't get me started on that. Though I still make strong recommendations almost every week for what I'd like to see in the classroom, there are other areas my heart is now seeing differently.

Meredith has irretrievable quirks and physical limitations. She will never walk typically or write her name by herself or understand social skills, but she will say "bon appetite" when she feeds the cat. Do I really need to keep trying to change her, to make her walk better, see better?

Her physical therapist recently let her go because she said Meredith had hit a plateau. I'm learning to appreciate Meredith for what she has become. It's far more compassionate than hauling her in for another therapy appointment. I love her for the unique teenager she is. Sometimes when I'm annoyed with her behavior, I just think about being in her shoes. I imagine myself with a leg being two inches higher, one eye being shut down, not being able to answer a question when asked and extreme inexplicable anxiety over getting in the car to go somewhere.

That's one tough road and Meredith rides it every single day. All I can really do is help her pick the right lane.

Editor's note: Sarah Barnes blogs about Meredith, special needs and other topics at her website: <www.sarahbarnes.com>.

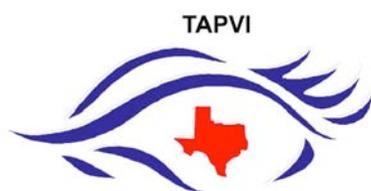
TAPVI Talks

By Isela Wilson, President, the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) and Jean Robinson, TSBVI Outreach, TAPVI Advisor

Abstract: TAPVI announces a new Board of Directors for 2012.

KeyWords: Family Wisdom, family organizations, visual impairments, Texas, TAPVI

We welcome our new board members: Joe Paschall, Alison Brown and Linda Hulett. Isela Wilson will continue as President and is grateful that these individuals came forward to serve our organization, the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI). Others that volunteered to be members at large and provide regional support are: John Gorman and Lynn Novay both in the Dallas area.



If you are interested in being a resource to other parents in your area please contact Isela or Jean. Texas is huge and TAPVI could use a few more good men and women. Think back to when you first heard the words “blind and visually impaired.” Did you feel all alone? Didn’t you wish there was someone to call who had been in that situation?

Along with other parent organizations, Isela participated in “Energizing & Engaging Our Texas Leaders” a workshop that featured Barry Silverberg, President of the Texas Association of Non-Profit Corporations. Barry pointed out the need to identify and understand our stakeholders which includes: families, educators and staff with state, medical and community agencies. What are our shared values? What are we passionate about that keeps us committed to our work? Barry will continue to help TAPVI clarify their mission and develop a plan of action to build the organization. Your input is welcomed and encouraged.

One idea that has been considered is starting a “TAPVI only” membership for \$10 a year. This amount keeps our group in line with other parent organizations in Texas such as DBMAT and TX Chargers. TAPVI can continue to be an affiliate of NAPVI as long as the annual affiliate dues of fifty dollars are paid. NAPVI asks that the individuals serving on the board of directors be part of the national organization. Annual dues for NAPVI membership are \$25 a year. Outreach has graciously offered to cover this expense for members willing to serve on our board.

TAPVI is here for you, so please give us feedback. What could our organization do to make it easier to raise a child with a visual impairment?

Board of Directors 2012

-
- Isela Wilson, President, iselawilson@yahoo.com, 956-778-1142
- Joe Paschall, Vice-President, joepaschall@tsbvi.edu, 512-206-9191
- Alison Brown, Secretary, smith_alison@hotmail.com, 281-286-9820
- Linda Hulett, Treasurer, lhulett9804@yahoo.com
- Jean Robinson, Advisor, jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu, 512-744-3004

Introduction to Computer Programming

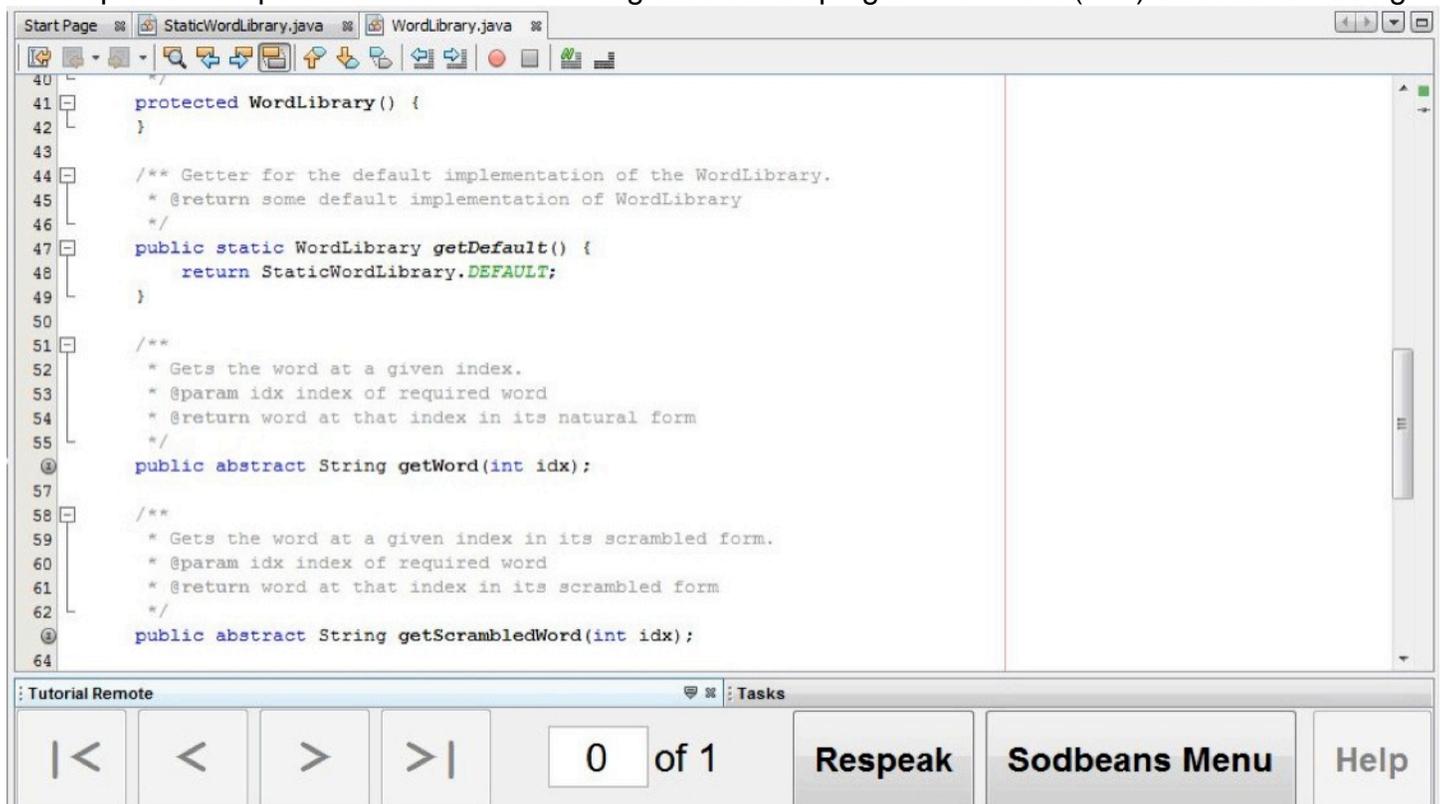
By Sherry Hahn, distance learning coordinator, Washington State School for the Blind

Abstract: the author describes a distance learning course in computer programming offered to students attending selected schools for the blind in the United States.

Keywords: Effective Practices, computer programming, blind, visually impaired

When it comes to computer programming, blind and visually impaired individuals are at a significant disadvantage compared to their sighted counterparts. That people with blindness are significantly underrepresented in the computing profession is an unfortunate state of affairs, as computer programming offers the blind population both a rich world to explore and a lucrative career path. A research team from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville and Washington State University has collaborated with five schools for the blind along with a mentorship board of successful blind programmers. With the financial support of the National Science Foundation, the team has been developing: (1) a novel auditory programming environment tailored to the special needs of the blind; (2) a computing curriculum that engages students in the construction, customization, and sharing of speech-based virtual worlds in order both to teach computer programming skills and inspire students to consider computing as a career; and (3) a blind-accessible web-based community portal designed to facilitate peer mentoring and support, and to provide opportunities for students to interact with role models who are blind or visually impaired and have succeeded in the computing profession.

In beginning computer programming, students will learn to use the Quorum programming language to develop and manipulate code within the integrated developing environment (IDE) Sodbeans. Using



```
40
41 protected WordLibrary() {
42 }
43
44 /** Getter for the default implementation of the WordLibrary.
45  * @return some default implementation of WordLibrary
46  */
47 public static WordLibrary getDefault() {
48     return StaticWordLibrary.DEFAULT;
49 }
50
51 /**
52  * Gets the word at a given index.
53  * @param idx index of required word
54  * @return word at that index in its natural form
55  */
56 public abstract String getWord(int idx);
57
58 /**
59  * Gets the word at a given index in its scrambled form.
60  * @param idx index of required word
61  * @return word at that index in its scrambled form
62  */
63 public abstract String getScrambledWord(int idx);
64
```

Photo Caption: Screenshot of Sodbeans 2.5

Quorum, students will learn the principles of the programming language and execute writing simple programs to develop a better understanding of the code and its functions. As students develop their knowledge of Quorum and its uses, student will develop music software and program robots. Beginning programming class will mainly consist of labs, discussion, group projects, homework assignments, intermittent quizzes, and some lecture. A prerequisite of pre-algebra and basic proficiency with the use of adaptive technology, the internet, and email, is highly recommended. Classes in computer programming will be offered by the five schools on their respective campus. During the summer a programming camp will be held the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) during which students participate in a three-day workshop.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) agreed to participate in the grant and offered the class in the spring of 2012. The class was taught through distance education by a teacher located at Washington School for the Blind and supported by a teacher from TSBVI. Using free available software the teacher in Washington was able to view the student's computer and correct any mistakes or misunderstandings by the student. Overall the class was a success and the TSBVI student was excited and eager to learn more computer programming.

*Editor's note: interested readers can learn more about the program at WSSB by going to:
www.wssb.wa.gov/Content/events/programming/programming.asp*

About Sodbeans at:

What is Sodbeans? <http://sodbeans.sourceforge.net/index.php>

About Sodbeans <http://www.cs.siue.edu/~astefik/Sodbeans.php>

Sodbeans Wins JavaOne 2011 Duke's Choice Award

<http://netbeans.dzone.com/news/sodbeans-netbeans-module-duke-2011-winner>

Is an iPad the Answer?

By Sharon Nichols, educational consultant, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: This article discusses some of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of the iPad with students with visual impairment and blindness.

Keywords: Effective Practices, iPad, visual impairment, accessibility, education.

As the iPad becomes the favored technology in our schools, I think back on all of the other technologies, which in their time were the answer to all educational needs. Is it even possible to believe that one technology will answer all educational needs? Is it not more important to ask what the goal of any technology might be? Or is the technology adopted before the task to achieve a goal is considered? Part of the answer might be to look at shelves of unused technology in a school which have been abandoned. Compared to past educational technology, how will the iPad fare?

It is true that the iPad is an accessible device out of the box for students who are visually impaired. There is a screen reader included (VoiceOver) and screen magnification (Zoom) feature built into the operating system. This is important because no other tablet device is accessible “out of the box”. However, is the student currently using another device, which might have already cost the district a



Photo caption: Screenshot of the iPad showing accessibility options

substantial amount of money? If the device the student currently uses addresses their ability to meet educational goals should it be abandoned for the newest technological fad?

Another question to ask is if the iPad is accessible for education. To answer this question we must define accessibility. For the purpose of this article, let's define accessibility as a student with a visual impairment's ability to use the iPad independently. The answer is simple: yes and no. While the iPad VoiceOver and Zoom are built-in, these features are only guaranteed to be compatible with the native iPad apps, which come loaded on the iPad including iBooks (the iPad's book reading app), Notes, Safari (an internet browser), Mail (email), and others.

iPad enthusiasts may expect the accessibility built into the iPad to allow a student who is visually impaired equal access to the curriculum in school. Unfortunately this is not the case. Consider the hundreds of thousands of apps available on the Apple App store. A great percentage of these apps will not be accessible to a student with visual impairment due to the app designer's lack of awareness concerning universal design. Most of the apps used in classrooms today are not accessible and the same is true of textbooks. Simply because they are digital textbooks does not mean they are accessible. So here are a few pros and cons for our students who might use the iPad.

iPad Pros

- portability and long battery life
- accessibility built-in
- classroom teachers are familiar with the device
- the student with visual impairments is using the same device as other students
- many books are accessible and available (Bookshare and Learning Ally)
- ease of use
- many useful and accessible apps for reading, writing, gathering information from the Internet, studying science and calculating equations

iPad Cons

- built-in keyboard difficult to use
- most apps are not accessible
- not a replacement for other technology being used by the student
- student will still be unique user (VoiceOver and Zoom), and most classroom teachers will not be able to assist them
- still requires the use of a computer for syncing files and apps
- requires an apple account to load apps
- has a lot of games and distractions

While and iPad is a powerful and useful technology tool for a student's educational use, it strengths and weaknesses must be considered in a school setting. It is important to remember that technological fads have come and gone in schools, as have other educational experiments meant to engage students raised on video games and YouTube with mixed results. Most educators are still divided over whether initiatives to give every student a laptop have made any academic difference.

Remembering these factors the use of an iPad by a student with visual impairment should be assessed and evaluated carefully for use in school and not just accepted as the new technological answer.

Resources

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Using the iPad with Students with Deafblindness, or My Adventure with the Shiny New Toy!

By Jamie Wheeler, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment, Birdville ISD, Ft. Worth, TX

Abstract: the author describes many iPad apps useful for students with deafblindness, or visual impairment and additional disabilities.

Keywords: Effective Practices, deafblind, iPad, multiple disabilities, educational apps

I suppose that there are as many different uses for the iPad with deafblind students as there are different deafblind students. I currently serve three deafblind students ranging in age from preschool to middle school. Each child is as unique as the applications that I have tried. Here are some of my favorites so far!

Before adding anything else to the unit I discovered that the camera is very useful! Using the camera my student with low vision is able to take screen shots of websites that she can refer back to for class content and organization. Most of her teachers have websites with calendars, assignments, and links to information that is crucial for the class. By taking screen shots my student has a photo that she can zoom in on and enlarge to refer to when organizing a "to do" list or calendar. We also discovered that a screen shot of a picture related to study materials (like a plant and animal cell) that we Googled is good when explaining concepts and referring to when the teacher has a picture on power point on the wall. Another use for the camera is to take pictures of color maps in the social studies book that the student can then zoom in on for details without having to look at black and white large print materials.

Some teachers also upload the power point presentation they are using and my student can go online and follow along on her iPad without having to use a telescope to view the projector screen. My dream would be to have electronic files of textbooks in her iBook library so we can do away with lugging large print everywhere.

We also discovered how to use the Air Display application to view materials presented on a document camera or computer display in a classroom. The student is able to use the iPad like a portable Video Magnifier to wirelessly view materials presented using a projector in her science class. The biggest challenge was getting the computer reimaged to Windows 7 and then finding classes with a document reader that would work with the iPad. My student is able to take screen shots of material and enlarge it to study detail, and then she can keep it in the photo album for future reference.

We used a variety of applications to work on speech, social skills, organization and planning, orientation and mobility, and core subject materials. Here are some of the applications we used this year.

Talking Tom

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/talking-tom-cat/id377194688?mt=8>)

Talking Ben the Dog

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/talking-ben-the-dog/id416345319?mt=8>)

These have been fun to use in speech class.

Functional Skills System in Social Skills Sampler

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/social-skills-sampler/id375425299?mt=8>) We watch a segment and then discuss appropriate social skills before role playing (I also type up the dialogue for my student to read)

Google Earth when discussing mapping and locations.

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/google-earth/id293622097?mt=8>)

iBooks for reading class required novels that can be modified for my students' vision

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ibooks/id364709193?mt=8>)

Data Analysis app, we use this for some graphing in math. Watch the tutorial on you tube.

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/dataanalysis/id375603883?mt=8>)

Jumbo calculator (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/jumbo-calculator/id361121377?mt=8>)

The Elementals and **Periodic Table of the Elements** are free periodic tables

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-elementals/id383675775?mt=8>, and
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/periodic-table-elements/id364894399?mt=8>)

Molecules is a good model representation of DNA and other molecules

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/molecules/id284943090?mt=8>)

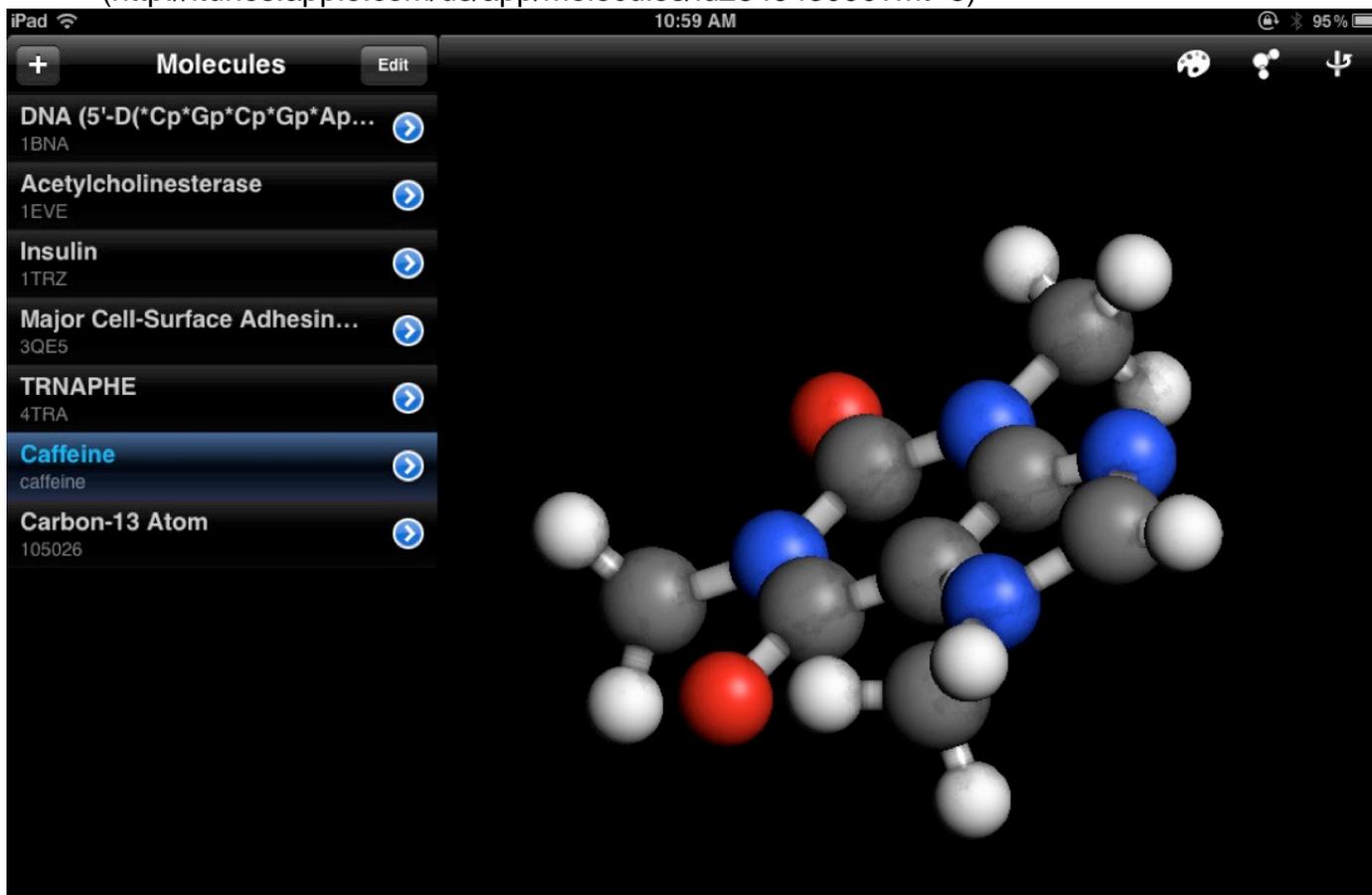


Photo Caption: Screenshot of the app Molecules showing a caffeine molecule

inClass allows organization, calendar, and “to do” list to be generated
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/inclass/id374986430?mt=8>)

Task Planner can be used for organization, creating a “to do” list
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/task-planner/id416404960?mt=8>)

We are using an iPad with a young deafblind student with cognitive delays to create schedules and routines by taking pictures and using the program called Visual Cue Lite, (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/visual-cue-lite/id442164732?mt=8>) which includes (visual scheduler, first – then, visual timer, visual cue, and count up/count down). Another younger student is using a program called Choice Board-Creator (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/choiceboard-creator/id453988580?mt=8>) to create individualized choice boards with speech output.

Here are some additional applications that they enjoy!

Baby Aquarium-my first colors and numbers HD has one large brightly colored fish on a simple background that when touched says a color name and changes.
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/baby-aquarium-my-first-colors/id414843313?mt=8>)

Baby Play Face: responds when touched with movement and name of body part – language can be changed from English to other languages
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/baby-play-face-fun-early-childhood/id430847304?mt=8>)

Life planner gives a graphic of how time is divided up in a day
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/life-planner/id317431904?mt=8>)

Glow Coloring has bright neon coloring on a black background
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/glow-coloring/id360776513?mt=8>)

The Bug Hunter LD has a magnifier that the student moves around the screen to find bugs and zap them (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-bug-hunter-ld/id452676581?mt=8>)

Sign 4 me: a translator from written English to signed English
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/sign-4-me-signed-english-translator/id312882992?mt=8>)

My Smart Hands Baby Sign Language Dictionary: a sign dictionary
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-smart-hands-baby-sign-language/id366804871?mt=8>

Tap to Talk augmentative communication board
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/taptotalk/id367083194?mt=8>)

Baby DJ is a musical app for cause and effect, with movement
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/baby-dj/id412610956?mt=8>)

Geared is a game in which the player puts together gears to make them spin
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/geared/id325793558?mt=8>)

Show Me allows you to write on a white board or write over the picture to show the student
(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/showme-interactive-whiteboard/id445066279?mt=8>)

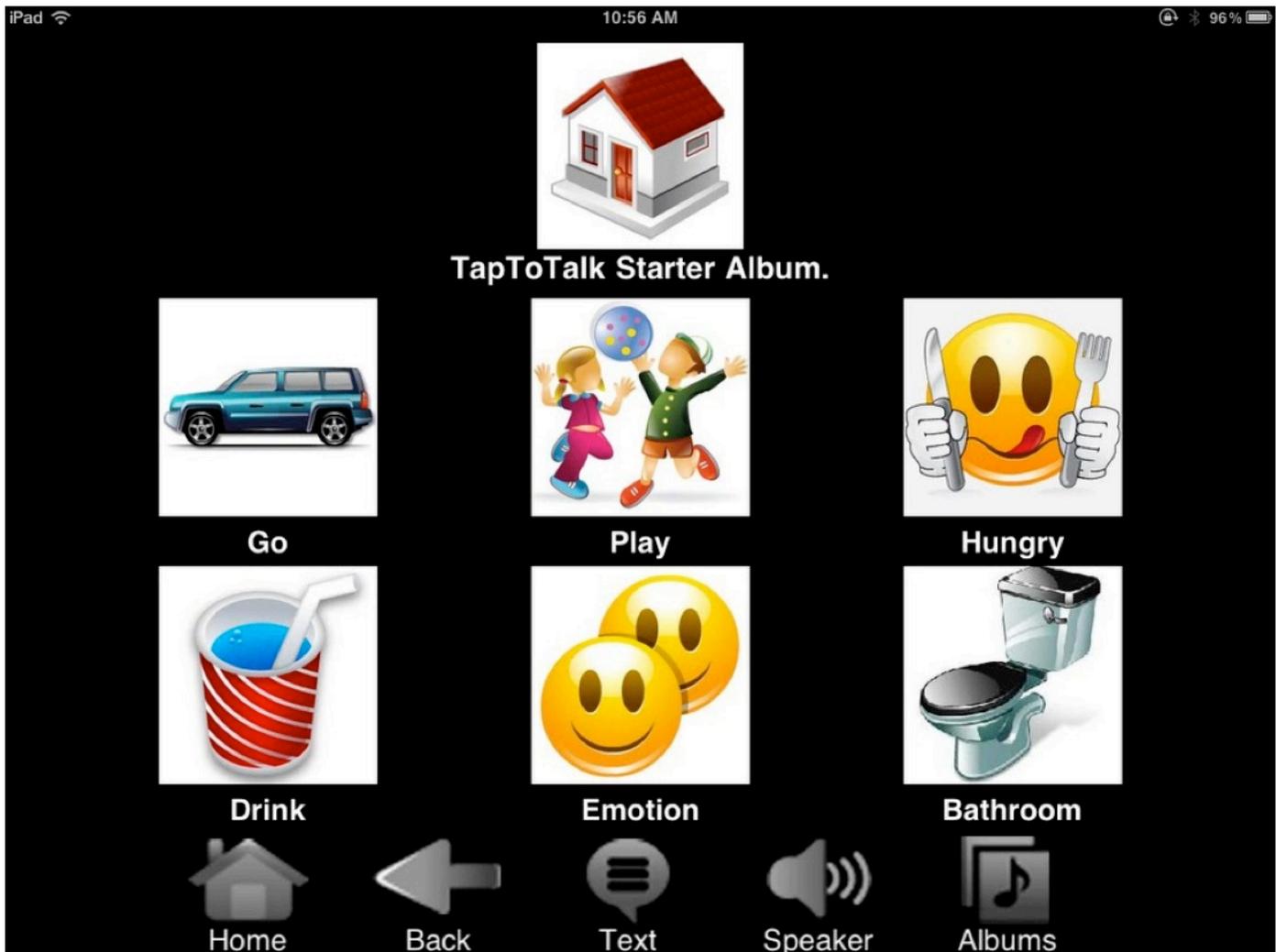


Photo caption: Screenshot of Tap to Talk

Touch and Say displays a simple face shows feelings, colors, songs, silly sounds, and will mimic sound student makes
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/touch-say/id444087388?mt=8>

PBS Kids Video is an app for the student to watch videos from PBS KIDS television series
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/pbs-kids-video/id435138734?mt=8>

Letter School is a great application for practicing letter and number formation that is highly motivating!
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/letterschool/id435476174?mt=8>

I have discovered that it is useful to have a stylus with the iPad when practicing writing on the iPad, and an external keyboard is helpful for students in academic classes for writing notes or assignments. Another important consideration has been the cover for the iPad for protection. With some students we have found that a rubberized cover like a Griffin Survivor or Otter Box provides the level of protection needed to allow the student safe access to the iPad.

It seems as if the world has gone iPad crazy, and I guess that I have too! I can't wait for the adventure to continue; the sky is the limit and for the first time in a long time. I feel like the playing field is just a little more fair for my students.

iPad Calculator Apps and the Order of Operation

By Pat Van Geem, assistive technology consultant, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach

Abstract: a review of accessible calculator apps for the iPad with a discussion of “order of operation.”

Keywords: Effective Practices, accessible calculator, iPad apps

When deciding on an iPad calculator app for students with visual impairments, you have to consider a few features. Some of the considerations are:

- size of the numbers and operations on the keys (for low vision users);
- color contrast between the keys and background;
- reflow resolution when using Zoom (screen magnification feature);
- how well it works with VoiceOver for users needing screen readers.

That is all good, but here is just one more glitch to keep in mind concerning calculator apps. It’s called “order of operation”. So what does this mean? In a math problem that does not have any parenthesis in the equation, yet contains both addition and multiplication operations, the order of operation rule states that the multiplication operation is solved first before addition. Huh?

Let’s take a math problem like $2+3\times 4=n$. If you solve this problem from left to right, the answer will be 20. If you solve this problem by the order of operation rule, the answer is 14. This is a “big” difference. It can affect the student’s grade on a test or assignment.

Now here is where the iPad comes into play. Calculator apps come in all shapes and sizes for the iPad. Some are great for students with visual impairment, while others not. Yet even if an app “appears” right for the student, you must check for order of operation. Not all apps are created equal.

So far 14 calculator apps were checked and only 7 follow the order of operation. Here below area a list of those seven apps.

Big Calc Free by Tioga Design, LLC.



Photo caption: Big Calc Free icon

iHandy Calculator HD Pro by iHandy Inc

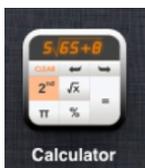


Photo caption: iHandy Calculator HD Pro icon

Calculator+ by xNeat.com

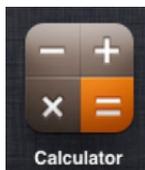


Photo caption: Calculator+ icon

Calculator S for iPad by idea2real

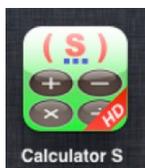


Photo caption: Calculator S for iPad icon

JumboCalculatorApp by Steven Mayer



Photo caption: JumboCalculatorApp icon

Calculator $\sqrt{\quad}$ by EmpoweredDesign



Photo caption: Calculator $\sqrt{\quad}$ icon

RetroCalc Free! By futuremedia



Photo caption: RetroCalc Free! icon

Many of the calculator apps are just labeled “calculator”, and not all of them may be accessible with VoiceOver. For VoiceOver and Zoom information on these apps go to www.applevis.com.

No Summer Pause at TSBVI

By Bill Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: In this article, Superintendent Daugherty discusses the many activities occurring at TSBVI during the summer months.

Keywords: News & Views, TSBVI. blind, visual impairments, summer programs, legislative session, partnerships and collaborations

It is June 11 and the first day of an action-packed five weeks of Summer Programs at TSBVI. Well over 300 students will attend a wide variety of programs. One group, in a program called Problem Busters, will be designing and building solar ovens with a professor of engineering from Texas A&M. Finally, an excellent use of the hot, sunny weather we experience here in Austin. Another group is attending Camp Challenge, and will be doing a lot of high adventure activities such as zip lining. Others are learning the catering business or working part time in the community while learning job-seeking and job-keeping back on campus. Behind the snazzy titles of these courses are hidden a lot of opportunities to work on social skills, technology, orientation and mobility and the entire list of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Activities at many other schools for the blind around the country often slow down to a trickle over the summer, but TSBVI is very serious about summer programming. Much planning and considerable expense goes into a fabulous menu of choices that are free of charge to students and their families. The overwhelming majority of students and parents rate the quality of the programs as very high.

TSBVI doesn't have the capacity to take in every student that applies, so we have to do some prioritization that looks at things like how many previous summers a student has had the opportunity to come. There was a time in Texas when people would complain about there not being any summer opportunities for kids. Now there are very good regional programs during the summer in many locales. Our Educational Service Centers are excellent resources that have information on summer activities, and DBS and the Lighthouses have come on strong with both information and programs. Partnerships between these organizations have become the norm these days when it comes to developing special programs. Among the many things that set Texas apart from most other states, these partnerships are a key difference that leads to their success and sustainability.

Another busy part of the TSBVI summer is preparing for the legislative session. This involves developing strategic plans around which the school organizes its budget and the activities the funding provides for. This year it appears all state agencies will be flat funded, and all have to submit a 10% reduction plan. Whenever one hears about schools being exempted from this, it doesn't apply to TSBVI. Fortunately, the Texas Legislature generally tries to treat TSBVI as fairly as they can given the constraints of the state economy. Anyone in the ISDs, ESCs, DBS, TSBVI or other organizations dependent upon state funding, can expect to find a legislative session easily as challenging as the last one. But today there is a connectedness between our groups that makes it much more likely that we will find ways to support each other in some meaningful fashion.

It is times like these that the partnerships and collaborations within the statewide system of service providers become so essential. No other state I am familiar with has a system of strong partners in quite the way we do. Certainly this system is not perfect, and some students in some places face

opportunity barriers we must all strive to eliminate, but the Texas system continues to up the bar on the quality and availability of supports. These efforts succeed way more than they fall short.

The relatively new emergence of parent groups advocating for appropriate services for their children is the latest, and perhaps greatest, opportunity to improve the outcomes of every student in the state. There is much constructive, common ground upon which parents and service providers can build opportunities for kids that will continue to chip away at the barriers to learning, employment and participation in community life. Parents are increasingly assuming leadership roles, not just advocating for their own children, but for all kids. Their voice at the local level can affect positive change within a district or region. At the state legislative level, no voice is attended to more than a parent of a child with a disability who is also a constituent.

It could be that Texas is going to go through a long period of austerity related to the state economy. Certainly the ISDs have felt a pinch that will require years to get back on track. It is times like these when our partnerships make the most difference, and Texas is getting to be a pretty well-oiled machine on collaboration. TSBVI is fully committed to do whatever it takes to make the statewide system work, and we know we are very fortunate to live in a state where our partners have the same commitment.

Marshalls Retail Training Program: a Successful Partnership with DARS

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

Abstract: In this article, Barbara J. Madrigal shares a story written by Cheryl Guido, Houston Region Field Director, about a joint training program with Marshalls/TJ Max in Houston. It describes the partnership between DARS and Marshalls and the training program to help consumers become successful employees.

Keywords: News & Views, DARS, Division for Blind Services, employment, blind, visually impaired

One of the cornerstones of a successful Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is the provision of quality services that assist consumers in preparing for work, and then entering and remaining in jobs. Our partnerships with business are critical to our success as a VR agency. The Division for Blind Services has several productive partnerships with businesses around the state. This story, as submitted by our Houston field director, Cheryl Guido, describes an exciting partnership with Marshalls.

Sherrie Saint-Amant, Workforce Development Manager at Marshalls/TJ Maxx Company first approached the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services in February 2011, in hopes of a partnership to hire individuals with disabilities. DARS Division for Blind Services worked together with our sister division, Division for Rehabilitation Services, to get this training program started in Houston. Sherrie met with us in Houston to inform us about all the programs and initiatives they have regarding hiring individuals with disabilities. After the initial successful meeting, she referred us to the local Marshalls regional directors to meet them and tour the facility.

Marshall's at Gulfgate Mall agreed to be the initial training site in Houston for this successful retail training program. The program first started in June of 2011 and it continues to this date. June 2012 commemorated the one year anniversary of this program! Management at the Gulfgate store allowed the Houston Launch Pad (CRP vendor) to come in and work hand-in-hand, developing an effective program for training people with disabilities in a retail setting. The store manager, Andre Peyton, has been very enthusiastic and supportive of this initiative. Mr. Peyton and the Marshall's store at Gulfgate Mall have been nominated for DARS DBS Employer of the Year and also for Business of the Year by the Texas Rehabilitation Association. The Marshalls program has expanded to the Marshalls in Sugarland (the CRP vendor at this store is Change Positive) and to the Marshalls Alameda location; both stores are also located in the Houston Metro area.

Marshalls' staff has been exceptionally adept at placing DARS DBS consumers in departments that allow them to utilize their strengths. This has allowed them to be cross-trained in different departments, in spite of their visual disabilities. Legally blind consumers have been very successful in this program, using low vision aids and hand held CCTVs when needed. DARS DBS consumers have proven themselves to be very capable of completing this training course and becoming productive Marshalls employees. They have consistently demonstrated very strong work ethics and positive attitudes throughout this whole process. Marshalls has also successfully trained DARS DRS employees at all three of these locations. DARS VR and Transition consumers have participated in these training programs.

The Marshalls retail training consists of four weeks of training: six hours per day, five days per week. The CRP/job coaching vendor is paid \$37.50 per hour and the consumer is paid by the CRP every Friday, at the rate of \$7.25 per hour. During the training the consumers work in every department of the store, except cashiering. They complete tasks such as unpacking boxes from the conveyor belt as merchandize is unloaded from the trucks, separating the merchandize by departments, placing the items on carts or in totes, folding or placing items on hangers, pricing, sizing and censoring the items. The trainees are also responsible for straightening shelves, creating displays, working as dressing room attendants, pairing shoes in the shoe department, recovering misplaced items and putting them back in the correct department and working as part of the morning clean-up crew. Prior to the end of the training, the job coach assists the consumers with filling out an application for Marshalls/TJ Maxx. On the last day of the training, the participants receive a Certificate of Completion during a graduation ceremony held at the training store. The job coaches have also been very instrumental in assisting the consumers with obtaining interviews at Marshalls or TJ Maxx stores close to their homes.

To participate in this program, consumers must have a positive attitude, be able to follow instructions, learn about the various store departments and be able to multi-task. Additionally, they need to be able to stand for six hours, bend, lift 5-10 pounds and use their hands. The work rules are explained to each participant prior to the first day of the training, including rules for absenteeism, tardiness, breaks, cell phones, personal belongings, and so on. Consumers must be able to pass a drug screening and a criminal background check before being hired at Marshall's. Consequently, consumers with a criminal background or substance abuse issues are not considered good candidates for this program.

The success rate for the Marshalls retail training program has been very impressive—this partnership has really produced fantastic results! Out of 67 consumers who have participated in this program, 36 DRS and 11 DBS consumers have received regular employment. Eleven consumers are still interviewing at various TJ Maxx and Marshalls stores near their homes, hoping to obtain employment soon. This is truly an example of an effective partnership between a committed business and the VR Program.

Soft Skills Workbook

Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disabilities Employment Policy web site
<www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills>

Abstract: A workbook developed by the Office of Disabilities Employment Policy assists young people in developing soft skills needed for employment.

Keywords: News & Views, Employment, Soft Skills, Office of Disabilities Employment Policy

“Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success,” is a curriculum developed by ODEP [U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disabilities Employment Policy] focused on teaching “soft” or workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities. Created for youth development professionals as an introduction to workplace interpersonal and professional skills, the curriculum is targeted for youth ages 14 to 21 in both in-school and out-of-school environments. The basic structure of the program is comprised of modular, hands-on, engaging activities that focus on six key skill areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism. www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/softskills.pdf

American Action Fund Makes Free Braille Books Available Online

Press Release from the American Action Fund <www.actionfund.org>

Abstract: This press releases provides information on how to obtain free Braille books on line from the American Action Fund

Keywords: News & Views, Braille books, American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, Blind, Visually Impaired

Baltimore, Maryland (February 28, 2012): The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults (AAF) is making its free Braille books for blind children available online as downloadable BRF files. Since 1997, the AAF has provided popular and award-winning children’s books, including titles from popular series, to blind children throughout the United States as well as to libraries and other organizations that serve blind children. The books have been and will continue to be distributed by mail, but now readers and libraries will be able to download them from the American Action Fund Web site. The BRF files are ready to be used on Braille notetakers and other Braille-aware devices.

Barbara Loos, president of the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, said: “The American Action Fund is pleased to make our free Braille books for blind children available on the Internet. Technology is making Braille more widely available than ever before, and we are proud to become part of this exciting trend.”

Dr. Marc Maurer, AAF executive director, said: “Braille literacy is one of the highest predictors of success in later life for blind students, so we want to do everything in our power to ensure that blind children have free and easy access to Braille books. This initiative will set blind children on a path to achievement and independence—not to mention giving them the simple joy of reading a good book.”

Paths to Literacy

Excerpt from the TSBVI website <www.tsbvi.edu>

Abstract: A new a web site has been launched to assist educators and families in providing literacy experiences for children who are blind or visually impaired.

Keywords: News & Views, TSBVI, Perkins School for the Blind, literacy, blind and visually impaired

It was with great pleasure that TSBVI together with Perkins School for the Blind announces a new website, Paths To Literacy for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

This site attempts to link to information for braille readers, print readers, students with multiple impairments, students with emerging literacy, English Language Learners, writing, technology, auditory access, dual media users, math literacy and more!

This site is meant to be interactive with active solicitation of ideas and dialogue from professionals and family members alike. It is our hope that the site continues to grow and change. Check it out at <www.pathstoliteracy.org>.

Assistive Technology Fund

Excerpt from the Association of Blind Citizens website <www.blindcitizens.org/assistive_tech.htm>

Abstract: This article provides information regarding the Association of Blind Citizens' Assistive Technology Fund

Keywords: News & Views, Blind, visually impaired, technology, Association of Blind Citizens

The Association of Blind Citizens operates the Assistive Technology Fund. The Assistive Technology Fund (ATF) will provide funds to cover 50% of the retail price of adaptive devices or software. The ABC board of directors believes that this program will allow blind and visually impaired individuals access to technology products that will have a significant impact on improving employment opportunities, increase the level of independence and enhance their overall quality of life.

The products covered by this program must retail for a minimum of \$200 with a maximum retail price of \$6,000. Persons eligible to apply for assistance must have a family income of less than \$50,000 and cash assets of less than \$20,000. Applications will be reviewed by the Assistive Technology Committee (ATC) and recommendations will be submitted for board approval. If applicants are selected to receive a technology grant, applicants will be asked to provide documents such as tax returns, bank statements and any other documents that the ABC board or it's designee would deem necessary to assess financial need for the grant.

Applicants must be legally blind and a resident of the United States to qualify for this program. Applications must be submitted by June 30th and December 31st for each grant period (two per year). Applicants will be notified if their request for a grant is approved. Applicants may submit one request per calendar year. All applications must be submitted via e-mail. You will be notified by ABC within 45 days after the application deadline. The grantee will have 30 days after notification to purchase the product. If the purchase cannot be made within 30 days ABC reserves the right to withdraw the award and assign it to another applicant. All decisions are final.

Important: Requests must be received via email only, by June 30th or December 31st. Please do not use attachments when submitting your request.

Editor's Note: the request form to copy and paste into your email request follows this article on the Association of Blind Citizens website at <www.blindcitizens.org/assistive_tech.htm>.

Sports Competition Invites Athletes who are Blind or Visually Impaired Students

Press Release from Region 10 Education Service Center <christy.householter@region10.org>

Abstract: The 14th Annual Sports Extravaganza for students with visual impairments will be held in Irving, TX this October.

Keywords: News & Views, blind, visually impaired, sports, fitness, competition

Students who are blind or visually impaired who might never consider competing in a sports event, are not only winning medals, but also succeeding in their every day activities. October 19-20, 2012 in Irving, Texas more than 300 athletes with visual impairments will compete in the 14th Annual Sports Extravaganza. Students with visual impairments will participate in Paralympic type and national sports such as Track and Field, Goalball, and Beep Baseball.

A student said "Sports Extravaganza increases my hope for the future. I got to practice some coaching skills by showing a friend how to warm up." A parent remarked "It is awesome to see the number of volunteers, especially young people, and the organization it takes to put this on. Mere thanks doesn't do all of you justice." "These students participate in Sports Extravaganza for fun, friendships and competition, and at the same time, develop skills that prepare them for life", says event coordinator, Christy Householter.

At this momentous event, students from all over the state of Texas and the United States are welcomed to compete October 19-20, 2012 at Nimitz High School in Irving, Texas. (Previous years have seen participation from athletes traveling from Colorado, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.) Sponsored by Region 10 Education Service Center and Lions Clubs International District 2-X1 and 2-E2, the Sports Extravaganza encourages physical fitness among children with visual impairments from infants to 22 year olds. The application, volunteer forms and more information can be found at <http://www.region10.org/SSVI/VI_Sports_Extravaganza.html>.

Legislative Update — Miscellaneous Texas Services

By Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent (TxP2P)

Reprinted from *Texas Parent to Parent Newsletter* Volume 11, issue 1, Spring 2012

Abstract: A review of Case Management services and Medicaid buy in program provided by Medicaid

Keywords: News & Views, Case Management, Medicaid, children with disabilities, Medicaid Buy In

Case Management for Children & Pregnant Women & Medicaid Buy In

Are you on Medicaid and need help finding health-related services?

Families receiving Medicaid are eligible for free case management services for children with disabilities, who have ongoing health conditions or health risks that other children the same age do not normally have; and to women with high risk pregnancies. Case managers can assist families in getting help with:

- Accessing needed medical services or dental care, including setting up visits with specialists,
- Assisting with family or behavioral problems,
- Ensuring your child's school is meeting their needs and attending school meetings,
- Financial or housing problems,
- Finding other help near where they live, and
- Helping to get medical supplies or equipment.

Services are provided to children with a health risk from birth through 20 years of age and will help families gain access to medical, social and other health-related services. If you are eligible for Medicaid and would like help in getting services to keep health problems from getting worse, contact the Texas Health Steps Outreach and Informing Hotline at 1-877-THSTEPS or 1-877-847-8377.

If you think you may be eligible for Medicaid but do not currently receive services, contact 2-1-1 to find out about services in your area. You may also apply for services at your local HHSC benefits office or online at www.yourtexasbenefits.com.

Medicaid Buy-In for Children

Need help paying for medical bills but make too much money for traditional Medicaid?

The Medicaid Buy-In for Children program can help pay medical bills for children with disabilities. The program is designed for families who need health insurance, but make too much money to get traditional Medicaid. Families are able to “buy in” to Medicaid by making a monthly payment.

To be in this program a child must:

- be age 18 or younger,
- meet the same rules for a disability that are used to get Supplemental Security Income (SSI),
- live in Texas; be a U.S. citizen or legal resident, and
- not be married.

The Medicaid Buy-In for Children program pays for health-care services such as doctor, dental or hospital visits; emergency care; medicine; glasses; mental health care; care in the home or other place of care; speech therapy; occupational therapy; physical therapy; regular checkups and help with Medicaid services (case management).

For more information, call 2-1-1 or 1-877-541-7905.

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

Texas Fellows

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters



Texas Fellow
Kathy Britsch
Tammy Averitt
Susan Butler
Mari Garza
Mari Garza
Vanamala Manohar
Tricia Lee
Tammy Henderson
Cynthia Carter
Janelle Felmet
Loretta Rockwell
Brenda Lee
Hillary Keyes
Bob Cope
Edwina Wilks

Candidate
Cindy Woolls
Pamela Thomas
Tracie Schiwart
Susan Little
Jodi Harris DeLeon
De Anne Arledge
Ashlei Humpert
Shannah Blankenship
Lenon Phillips
Jerry Mullins
Jeffrey Greer
Roxanne Light
Vickie Korenek
Donna O'Brien
Elizabeth Watt

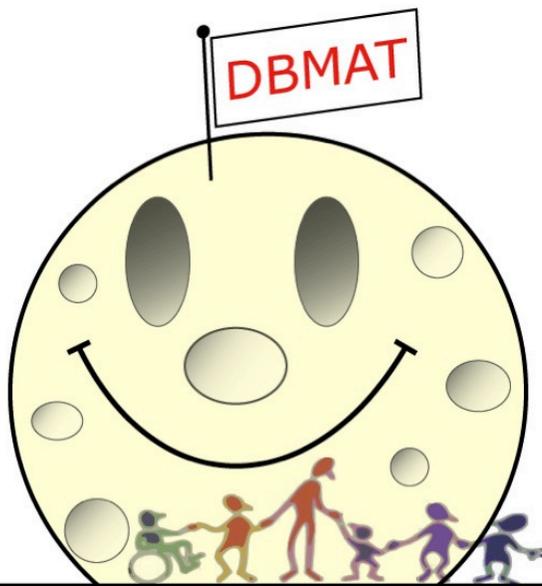


For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow or working as a VI professional contact KC Dignan at <kcd@tsbvi.edu>.

Bulletin Board

Announcements/Regional, State, National Training and Events

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



DBMAT: "A SMILE AS BIG AS THE MOON" 39th Annual Family Conference & Workshop

October 12-14, 2012

Camp John Marc
3247 County Road 1105
Meridian, Texas

The DBMAT Conference Planning Committee is diligently working to bring about a relaxing, fun-filled, learning weekend for the whole family in a pleasant rustic environment. The conference is designed for families of children & adults who are deafblind with multiple disabilities and the professionals who serve them.

A SMILE AS BIG AS THE MOON

The year's conference features Dr. Linda Mamer. Dr. Mamer is currently working at the British Columbia Provincial Outreach Program for Individuals with Deaf-blindness as a Resource Consultant, traveling throughout the province consulting with schools that have students with deaf-blindness. In addition, she consults with Supported Independent Living Residences for adults with congenital deaf-blindness. She teaches university and college courses for interveners for children who are deaf-blind, educational assistants, preschool workers, teachers, and counsellors across Canada and in the United States.

This weekend is co-sponsored by the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS-DBS) and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Deafblind Outreach. DBMAT appreciates this support of families.

Visit www.dbmat-tx.org for more information as it becomes available.
Space is limited so send in your registration early!!!



7th Annual Texas Chargers Retreat

November 2nd - 4th, 2012

Camp Allen, Navasota Texas

Keynote Presenter: David Brown

The 2012 Texas Charger's Retreat is sure to be the most exciting retreat yet. There are many options for our families including a new "family time" event. We are excited to have David Brown, California Deaf-Blind Specialist and CHARGE "guru" as our main presenter. David will speak to families regarding persons with charge and education. David is also excited to meet personally with families during our retreat.

2012 Registration Fees for Annual Retreat

Family: \$125.000 per family (parents of a person with CHARGE, persons with CHARGE, siblings, grandparents, and one attendant of the person with CHARGE) which includes lodging for both nights and six meals.

Other Guests: \$150.00 per person, (if you do not qualify above), which includes lodging for both nights and six meals. \$100.00 for children 12 and younger per child, which includes lodging for both nights and six meals.

Professional/Day Guest: \$50 per person per Day Guest Saturday (includes lunch)

For assistance with registration fees we recommend you contact your DARS Representative, Special Education Department, ECI, TSBVI or complete a scholarship form. Scholarships are only available for the family level.

Registration Open!!!!

For Registration Assistance Contact: Leigh Fultz at 936-825-1988

Visit www.txchargers.org for more information.

Save the Dates!!!

The 11th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference: Experience the Wonder

July 25 - 28, 2013
Scottsdale, Arizona

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

There will be many more conference details in the months ahead so check the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation website often. <http://chargesyndrome.org>

Introduction to the Intervener Team Model

Sponsored by the Texas Deafblind Project
Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Program

**TSBVI Conference Center, Austin, TX
September 21-22, 2012**

Interveners need specialized skills related to deafblindness, in order to provide one-on-one instructional support to students who are deafblind. They need appropriate supervision and support from the IEP team. To help meet the needs of interveners in Texas, the Texas Deafblind Project at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired is pleased to announce the 2012 Introduction to the Intervener Team Model.

This workshop is for those individuals who are newly assigned in the role as an Intervener or for current Interveners who have not yet had the opportunity to attend this introductory training. Each intervener should attend this training with a professional member of the educational team (ideally the classroom teacher, but this could also be a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, teacher of students with visual impairments, or another professional regularly involved with the deafblind student). Family members (parents or guardians) of the student are welcomed to attend, as well.

Training Areas Include:

- Experiencing the World of Deafblindness: Impact & Implications
- Intervener Competencies & Training Updates
- Intervener and Team Roles & Responsibilities
- The Five Components of Quality Intervention Intervention
- Issues & Considerations in the Areas of: Trust and Security; Physical Space, Positioning, and Orientation & Mobility; Materials, Devices, and Equipment; Communication and Literacy; Pacing and Content.
- Identification of Tools and Strategies to Support the Student Profile

Breakout sessions have been designed to meet the needs of individuals, based on student communication levels.

Registration is available on the web at: www.tsbvi.edu/deaf-blind-project

Registration Fee:

Professionals / Family – \$35.00 (Late Registration \$50.00)

Interveners / Paraprofessionals – FREE!! (Late Registration 50.00)

Out of State – \$50.00 (Late Registration \$75.00)

Register Now! Early Registration closes 9/7/2012. Late Registration until 9/17/2012.

For further information please contact:

Brian Sobek, Admin Assistant – Phone: (512) 206-9225; Email: briansobek@tsbvi.edu
Jenny Lace, Education Specialist – Phone: (512) 206-9389; Email: jennylace@tsbvi.edu

14th Annual Sports Extravaganza for Blind and Visually Impaired Students

When: October 19 & 20, 2012
Friday - Beginners Goalball Tournament (5-10 p.m.)
Saturday - Individual Events (8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Where: Nimitz High School
100 W. Oakdale
Irving, Texas 75060

Who: All students with visual impairments, ages 0-22

Cost: There are no entry fees, but families will need to pay their own expenses for transportation and lodging if needed. (Some financial assistance may be available from your local Lions Club. Please call for more details.)

Food: Lunch on Saturday will be provided by Lions Clubs International District 2-X1 and 2-E2.

Hotel: Country Inn & Suites – Irving, Texas

Registration packets available late August, 2012
www.region10.org/SSVI/VI_Sports_Extravaganza.html

Some Other Dates to Remember

Here are the dates for some events later in the fall. Be on the lookout for more information, but put these dates on your calendar now!.

November 1-3, 2012

Southwest Orientation and Mobility Association (SWOMA) Annual Conference

Location: Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Austin, TX

Save the date! More information will be available soon!

November 17, 2012

14th Annual Sowell Center Lecture Series

Lecture on complex intersections will be featured. More information will be available, but save the date! Go to <http://cms.educ.ttu.edu/research/sowell/default/> for more information.

February 22-23, 2013

2013 Texas Symposium on Deafblindness

Sponsored by the Texas Deafblind Project/Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach at the Omni Southpark Hotel, Austin, TX.

TX SenseAbilities

Published quarterly: February, May, August, and November

Available in Spanish and English on TSBVI's website at <www.tsbvi.edu>.

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

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March 1st for the Spring edition
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