In pre-school, Lyra is learning to read both print and braille. Learn more about why her mother is a strong supporter of dual-media in “Sight Unseen,” starting on page 4 in the the Family Wisdom section.
Essay to the National Honor Society

By Gabriel Cazares, High School Senior, Houston, TX

Abstract: A high school student with a visual impairment applies to become a member of the National Honor Society. He gives his motivation for wanting to become a member and the contributions he will make as a member of NHS.

Keywords: blind, visual impairment, glaucoma, National Honor Society

Editor’s note: Gabriel lives in Houston with his mom, dad, and two brothers. All the males have glaucoma. He participated in the school district’s choir programs until he fell in love with debate. He has been vice president of the debate team for 3 years. He holds leadership positions with the National Youth Leadership Network, the National Kids As Self-Advocates, and with his church youth group.

Often times people make erroneous assumptions when it comes to an individual with a disability. Our modern culture has portrayed negative images of people with disabilities. The world thinks that because someone is impaired they have to lower their standards and expectations in order for the individual to meet them. I, as a student with a visual impairment, feel insulted by this. One who is disabled can perform equally with their peers if they have the right skills, motivation, and determination to do so. One thing that sets me aside from the rest is the fact that I don’t ever take “NO” for an answer. If something doesn’t work the first time, I reconsider my situation, and think of other ways to approach the same problem until I come up with the best solution.

My biggest contribution to the Northbrook High School chapter of the National Honor Society is proving wrong stereotypical points of view that people may have about me. Even some of my fellow peers that have been with me since elementary school sometimes think that just because I’m blind things are handed to me on a silver platter. Even though I wish this was true, it is not. I have to work just as hard, and sometimes even harder than they do to achieve my goals. By becoming a member of the National Honor Society I will prove to everyone that just because I’m blind doesn’t mean that I don’t have the same potential to be as successful as everyone else.

Another fact that has motivated me to apply to be a member of the National Honor Society is to promote academic achievement throughout our school. Many students come in with the mentality that Northbrook is a school where academic achievement is not stressed. However, what I have learned through my four year journey on our campus is that school is only as good or as bad as you choose to make it. From my perspective those who want to better themselves have all the opportunities to do so in our school.

The final and most personal reason I would like to join the NHS is to show my younger brother that anything is achievable if you try hard enough. Coming from a Mexican/American background where all my siblings were on different academic levels, reaching a distinction like the National Honor Society is a significant accomplishment. I have people that I have admired for their tireless efforts to better themselves, and I would like to be the same for others. I may not be the smartest, the most talented, or the most popular; but whatever I do, I do it to the best of my ability. As an Honor Society member proving wrong stereotypical views, promoting academic achievement, and being a role model for my siblings and whoever else may be watching, are the three biggest contributions I can bring to the organization.
Sleep & Exercise: Two Vital Needs for Pre-Teens and Teens With Deafblindness

By Leslie Fansler, Tired Mother of the Famous Flying Fanslers, Amarillo, TX

Abstract: One parent shares her personal wisdom and humor on the importance of making sure individuals with deafblindness get plenty of sleep and exercise.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblind, behavior, sleep, exercise, adolescence

Editor’s Note: There is great opportunity to learn when families have the chance to get together and share their experiences with each other! Even when we’re not able to be physically present in the same room, virtual communities such as listservs and Facebook can be just as effective (see TAPVI article). This truth was brought home recently as a discussion unfolded on the listserv for members of the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT). Through sharing personal experiences and lessons learned, a community reached out to one family and helped them think about options to address their child’s behavioral issues. Following is the advice that Leslie Fansler, a parent of a young adult with deafblindness, shared with the deafblind community. Her advice is relevant for everyone.

ALL teenage boys are challenges to parents! We speak from experience, being the parents of one son with deafblindness and one without. Socially, they tend to be half crazy. For instance, they like girls but have little idea how to express that in a way that any girl would appreciate. Maturity flips back and forth between secretly wanting to play with transformers and Tonka trucks and trying to be “grown-up” and cool. Hygiene is a big contest. Their feet stink, and they will NOT take a bath or use a deodorant unless you force them. (Their gym clothes have to be exterminated by the end of middle school.) Sleep? They want to sleep about 20 hours out of every 24! Oh...and the four hours they actually stay awake just happen to be between midnight and 4:00 a.m. Those wakeful hours, by the way, are usually spent lifting weights and listening to horrible music. Get the picture?

Both of our sons are now in their early 20’s. We all survived, so here’s my two cents on what got us through the teens. First, teenage boys need tons of SLEEP. Second, teenage boys need tons of EXERCISE. I can’t overstate how badly they need both from about age 12 to age 22. I don’t discount other supports teenagers with deafblindness need, but I have found sleep and exercise vital needs that are easy to overlook.

SLEEP

Without enough rest, things get extremely difficult during those preteen-teen years. Often, in middle school, my oldest would come home from school on Friday and go straight to bed (at 6:00 pm) and sleep until 2:00 pm on Saturday. This really freaked me out. I took him to the doctor, who impressed upon me that teen boys have really crazy things going on physically, emotionally, and socially. “Let him sleep!” he said. So make sure your guys with deafblindness sleep a LOT, because for them life is all the more confusing and more tiring!

EXERCISE

It is not a coincidence that middle schools and high schools are full of want-to-be jocks (excuse me, “athletes”). They have so much going on in their bodies that they have to MOVE a lot, and it has to be physically taxing movement. For our guys with deafblindness this is hard. They tend not to be in motion significantly on their own. You MUST find things they can do that are equal to running track, playing football, lifting weights, chasing girls, etc. They HAVE TO HAVE THIS. If your guy is not sweating several times a week, you will have MAJOR behavior problems, even...
with great meds and fabulous interveners. Use treadmills, stationary bikes, and the local gym (swimming pools are so great). Pre-teens and teen guys who do not sweat every week will do things like hit, pinch, punch walls, and throw things.

Preston works out, with support, at the gym four nights a week, for about two hours each time. It makes him sweat; he gets out of the house; he meets and greets people from our community; and he can do his best to flirt with girls. But best of all, he can SHOWER there!

In summary, as your guy with deafblindness reaches 12, my advice is to check with your doctor about medication options; make sure he has a communication system he can access and use; get a good intervener at school AND at home, and make sure—no matter what—that he gets lots of sleep and exercise. He'll sweat more often, but he'll also act nicer and sleep better afterward. It's a great trade-off for occasionally stinking. Trust me!

By the way, did I say we've have recently adopted another little girl? Yes, the Fansler Clan now has two little girls (ages 6 and 3). I did not realize how old and tired we were until the 3 year old arrived. Pray for us!

Sight Unseen

By Mashawna Thompson, Parent & Member, NOAH Board of Directors, Kansas

Abstract: The author shares her thoughts on why her family chose for their daughter with albinism to learn both print and braille.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, visual impairment, albinism, dual-media instruction, parent education and advocacy

Editor's Note: The following article is printed with permission from Parent of a Child with Albinism, a wonderful blog that shares her family’s journey with their daughter with albinism. Be sure to also check out the video, Perception is Not Reality, which was also developed by the author. Mashawna Thompson is a member of the Board of Directors for the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH). The views and opinions expressed in this article are her own, and are not intended to reflect of the views of the NOAH Board of Directors.

Beginning this year, her first year of preschool, Lyra has been learning both print and braille. This concept is known as “dual-media.” I must admit, when Lyra was a baby, and we were still coming to terms with her condition, the LAST thing I wanted to hear was someone telling me that Lyra might need braille. Braille was for blind people and my baby was NOT going to be blind. Most of what I heard and read up to this point told me that Lyra's vision would be good enough that she could read print and not need to learn braille. So how did I become such a strong supporter of dual-media?

The concept was first introduced by one of Lyra's Teachers of the Visually Impaired, when she was receiving early intervention services. At this point I began doing my own research. I not only read dozens of articles and papers, I also talked to other parents of children with albinism and adults with albinism. I was beginning to realize that there was just not enough evidence to prove to me that Lyra would never need braille. I became convinced that for some situations, at various times in the future, braille might be her best option.
I learned that the use of braille may prevent or reduce eye strain, headaches, and neck and back problems caused by poor posture. With braille, Lyra would not be dependent on certain lighting conditions, print size, or the availability of magnification devices. If she has trouble reading her own handwriting, braille could be used for taking notes.

“I dream of being able to read a book myself, not through an audio book, and be able to read and read until I feel like stopping – not because I’m getting a headache or am tired of holding a magnifier or sitting in some strange position – but because I just want to stop,” (Heather Kirkwood, adult with albinism)

“It’s true, the majority of people with albinism do not read braille. Why is that? It may be that they truly don’t need it. It could be that they were never given the opportunity to learn braille. “I would have benefited greatly from learning braille as a young kid, but indeed wasn’t even offered the opportunity until adulthood – an area where I feel the system let me down.” (Heather Kirkwood, adult with albinism)

Just because it’s the way it’s always been done, doesn’t mean it’s always been the right decision. “In the past, teachers struggled over the decision to teach braille to students who had the capacity to use print. However, students who were inefficient in print reading and writing had no alternative other than to struggle with that inefficiency.” (Koenig and Holbrook, 2000, p. 296)

I know there are many examples of people with albinism who excelled through school and went on to become very successful adults in lots of different career areas, but at what costs?

Marleena Coulston, adult with albinism, was introduced to braille in 7th grade, after her reading speed had begun to decline, but at that point, she says she was very resistant to it. “I most definitely have had to work harder than my peers, due to my eyes tiring from the heavy amounts of reading. Everything took twice as long for me to complete and do. Tests always took longer, my homework always took longer...I think that braille would have made a difference. I think it’s a good thing. I probably would have adjusted better if they had introduced braille to me at an earlier age.”

Past examples and trends do not prove that my child won’t need it. The ranges of visual acuities in people with albinism vary widely. I can’t predict if braille will be useful to Lyra in the future and neither can anyone else.

The purpose of her learning braille isn’t so she can get away with doing less. I want to enable Lyra to do more than just get by. I want her to have the confidence and ability to reach her highest potential. Her ability to succeed should not be limited by her visual impairment. I do want her to learn the value of hard work and even struggle at times, not because of her vision, but because she is continually provided a challenging curriculum. She needs to acquire the skills necessary to survive in the real world. She needs to know that she can’t truly become successful by constantly using her visual impairment as a crutch. I’ve
stopped lowering my expectations and no longer focus on her limitations. I don’t make excuses for her; I let her try something again and again.

“The pupil who is never required to do what he cannot do, never does what he can do.” (John Stuart Mill)

This decision we’ve made for Lyra has not been without criticism. Here are some of the arguments we’ve heard.

I’M TRYING TO MAKE HER BLIND.

I know that Lyra is not totally blind, which is why I don’t expect her to learn and rely on only braille. However, she is not totally sighted either, so why should she be expected to learn/rely on only print?

One of the reasons we were told, against her learning braille, was that she is primarily a “visual learner.” We agree that Lyra is a visual learner and want to optimize this strength when it’s most effective. However, it doesn’t mean that her vision will always be the most efficient way to access information. If relying on only her visual ability for reading causes her to fall behind her peers and often results in physical pain, why would she even want to read.

“The only books I have read for pleasure are books that I am EXTREMELY interested in reading. Had I learned braille I might have had more of a love for reading. I just looked at reading as a BIG CHORE.” (Margaret Mary Campbell, adult with albinism)

USING BRAILLE WILL MAKE HER LOOK BLINDER.

In my opinion, holding a book/paper an inch away from her face or sticking her nose down to her plate of food would be much more noticeable and make her appear “blind.” Using braille will not make her look different, any more than wearing head phones for audio materials, using a CCTV, or using a hand held magnification device would. Children will always notice differences, it doesn’t matter what the specific difference is. Our approach on dealing with this is basically just being aware and looking out for any social or emotional issues.

SHE WILL JUST READ THE DOTS VISUALLY OR WILL BE RESISTANT TO LEARNING BRAILLE.

Children will often look for the easy way out; it doesn’t mean we make learning something optional. If she’s trying to read the dots visually, there are lots of things we could try to help her break the habit... put a piece of paper over her hand or place a partition of some sort between her eyes and her hands. Learning braille is only as hard as the teacher makes it. If the teacher goes into it with the attitude and belief that kids with low vision CAN’T learn braille, it will affect that student’s confidence and ultimately his/her success in learning braille.

IT’S UNNECESSARY TO LEARN BRAILLE, WITH TODAY’S TECHNOLOGY. WHY BOTHER WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER OPTIONS.

There are lots of alternatives to braille available, low tech and high tech magnification devices, audio books, large print, and more, but there are limitations with all of them. Other than audio format, all of the other options are visual so there is still the issue of eye strain and fatigue. Of all of the available options, none of them are as versatile as braille. You can read braille in bright light, low light or even no light. Braille doesn’t require a computer, an audio player, or even electricity. You can’t assume that what works for one person will work for everyone. “I had a tough time adjusting to books on tape because my mind wandered. I’m actually, IRONICALLY, a “visual learner.” (Marleena Coulston, adult with albinism)

Chantel Alberhasky, parent of a child with albinism said, “It was once believed that technology would replace braille for people with low vision, but just as technology cannot replace print it cannot replace braille.” Technology has had a huge impact on the use of braille, not by replacing it,
but by making it even more accessible/attainable. Through the power of technology and programs like Book Share and Web-Braille, books in digital format can be downloaded from the internet and printed on an embosser for immediate access.

**IT SHOULD BE HER CHOICE.**

Yes and no. Lyra is not yet old enough to understand the importance of becoming a good reader. Even if when she is a little older, she becomes resistant to learning braille, I will still require her to continue her braille instruction. I'm sure many students have complained about learning how to read print, but we would never let them opt out of print reading simply because they didn't like it. Yes, when Lyra is an adult, I want her to be able choose if, when, and where she wants to use braille. In order for her to truly have that choice, and really be equipped to use braille, she must be proficient and fluent with it. Of course she won't think it’s useful, or recognize the possibilities with braille if all she ever learns is the braille alphabet.

“My son is only finishing kindergarten, but he is learning braille along with print. I am just giving him the tools to help him be as successful as he can be,” said Chris Kramer, parent of a child with albinism. Braille is a tool, just like a Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) is a tool. Neither can be used effectively with out proper training. With both tools, it is necessary to provide the child with the knowledge and skills required to benefit from its use. You must begin that instruction very early, before it’s even needed. When that child is older, he/she may or may not choose to use a CCTV or braille, but at least he/she has the knowledge and skills needed to really make that decision.

I'M CAUSING HER TO BE LESS INDEPENDENT OR MAKING HER MORE "DISABLED".

According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of disable is to make incapable or ineffective; especially: to deprive of physical, moral, or intellectual strength. In no way am I trying to make her less capable or weaken her ability to succeed. I'm doing the exact opposite. I don't want to limit her, I want to empower her.

“Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality.” (Ralph Marston)

I've heard too many examples of adults with albinism not being able to read for long periods of time and having slower reading speeds and suffering from intense eye strain and headaches. I can't say for sure that when she is older, she will definitely experience eye strain and headaches, but I can't say for sure that she won't either. “As a 35 year old I personally wish I had learned braille, especially with some of the things I've done in the workplace. I've had to give several lengthy presentations, too long to not have notes for... and it is not good PR to be constantly peering at a paper less than an inch from your face rather than looking at your audience.” (Julie Stevenson, adult with albinism)
The decision of whether or not a child should learn braille should be based on input from his/her IEP team. It is not a decision that should be determined based on the opinion or recommendation of just one person, including a doctor. Information from medical professionals is very important and very useful and absolutely must be considered in the development of the child’s IEP. However, the decision to provide braille instruction is an educational decision, not a medical decision. When making that decision, the team must consider the child’s current needs and also his/her future needs. The reading requirements of a 1st grader are different in many ways than the reading requirements of a high schooler. As the print size gets smaller and reading requirements increase in amount and complexity, will the student still be able to keep up?

As of now, in terms of her cognitive abilities, Lyra is doing extremely well. She is very imaginative and highly curious. I expect her to excel in school. Why shouldn’t I? What if in our family, we expect more than just average academic performance? What good does it do a child to base goals on ideas such as “at grade level” and “proficiency”, if he/she is capable of excelling far beyond those standards? Someday Lyra may decide she wants to be a brain surgeon, or a chemical engineer, or who knows what else. I want her to be equipped with any tools/skills she might need along the way in order to accomplish that kind of success. I want to increase her independence and give her more flexibility. What ever she decides for her future, I will do everything I can to help make that possible.

It doesn’t matter if every child with albinism before her did perfectly fine without braille. Lyra is an individual. My husband and I are her parents and we are making this decision for Lyra. I won’t criticize parents who choose for their child not to use braille nor will I criticize adults with albinism who don’t use braille. That’s their decision. But don’t be so quick to judge me either. Please respect and understand that based on the needs of our child, we are making the best decision possible.

“If you’re considering braille, your child should first be given a quality learning media assessment that evaluates your child’s abilities, not just in one controlled environment, but in a variety of settings. However, that alone cannot be the only determining factor. One of the provisions of IDEA is that a school may not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for the child. More information about the IDEA provisions regarding braille instruction can be found at the following website. <http://idea.ed.gov>

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“It don’t limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time” (Rabbinical Saying)

REFERENCES


**What Is Maddie Going to Be When She Grows Up?**

By Debra Garvue, Parent, Kentucky

Reprinted with permission from *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, 17 (1), Fall, 2009.

Abstract: The author shares her reflections on how she came to learn from her daughter with deafblindness the answer to every parent’s question, “What will my child be when she grows up?”

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblindness, futures planning, adult life

Editor’s note: Deaf-Blind Perspectives is a free publication with articles, essays, and announcements about topics related to people who are deaf-blind. Published two times a year (Spring and Fall) by The Teaching Research Institute of Western Oregon University, its purpose is to provide information and serve as a forum for discussion and sharing ideas. The intended audience includes people with deafblindness, family members, teachers, and other service providers and professionals. To learn more about Deaf-Blind Perspectives, check out their website at <www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp/index.htm>.

When you learn that your child is deafblind, you become consumed by many concerns. Once I accepted and understood my daughter’s diagnosis, I still had many questions: not just questions about her current needs like “What can she see?,” “Who is a good therapist?,” or “When will her IEP meeting be?,” but also questions about her future. The most basic and gut wrenching question I had was this: “What is my child going to be when she grows up?”

I found this question hard. I had watched my older daughter flourish. When she was little and played with a doctor’s set, I dreamed of her becoming a doctor. When she tried to argue her way out of punishments, I thought to myself, “Wow, she would make a great lawyer!” But the basic parenting rules I knew didn’t seem to apply to Maddie. I couldn’t find her case in any parent book. Dr. Spock had no advice for me.

Maddie was born with Leber’s Congenital Amaurosis. Generally this genetic disorder affects eyesight only. However, in addition to her vision loss, Maddie was born with bilateral pro-
Family Wisdom

“It is like a nagging ball of worry in the pit of my stomach. The question haunts me! Will my child grow up to be something, or will she be an eternal companion whom I care for and who never leaves her mark on society?”

Recently during a very difficult time, I had an epiphany, one of those rare moments when a light shone down and I knew the answer to that question. Maddie had been hospitalized for about ten weeks. She was on a ventilator for eight of those weeks, and for awhile it was touch and go. I watched her struggle to survive. When she was about a week into her struggle, I developed a website to let friends and family members keep track of her condition, and I was blown away by how many hits it received. It seemed as if everyone was reaching out to Maddie and my family. Friends and family members shared Maddie’s site with people they knew, and soon we were receiving hugs and cards from people I had never met. It was inspiring to know how many people were touched by her fight to live.

This led me to wonder, to contemplate deeply, how many lives has Maddie touched? Therapists? Teachers? Doctors? Nurses? Friends? Family? The list is endless. And I realized that I already know what my child will be when she grows up, because she is already it. She has chosen her profession and is practicing it now, and I know that she is already making a mark on society. She is changing the way people think and function in their daily lives. She has inspired me to leave my job as an educator and enter the field of deafblindness with the hope that I can make a difference. What is she? Why, she went into the family business. She is a teacher.

To read Maddie’s journal, go to: <www.caringbridge.org/visit/maddiegarvue>.

Life Skills Summer Camp at TSBVI

By Christina and Pete Suarez, Harlingen, TX

Abstract: Parents describe the emotional process of sending their son to an overnight camp. Their reluctance did not prevent them from leaving him and the experience was positive for everyone.

Keywords: blind, retinopathy of prematurity, ROP, camp

We have two boys Peter, age ten and Christian, age eight. Christian is blind due to ROP. Last summer we decided to try again and register Christian for summer Life Skills camp at TSBVI. The summer of 2008 we signed him up but there was no room for him, which was okay for us because we were not ready for that step yet. In May, we received a letter that Christian was accepted to attend summer camp in July, 2009. Although, still not sure if we were ready I sent in all the forms that were necessary.

Summer came and we still had June to prepare for the trip to Austin. Soon July was here and we were ready for the trip to TSBVI. I had made arrangements for Peter and me to stay at my brother’s house in Austin so we could be close.

The day we arrived in Austin, my husband Pete, who had to go back to work in Harlingen, decided that he didn’t want to send Christian to the school because he had a runny nose. He wanted to turn around and take Christian back home. He still wasn’t ready for this step yet.

Because I spent weeks packing and getting emotionally ready for the trip, I didn’t want to just turn around and go home, so we talked and we de-
decided that this experience was going to be good for Christian and for us. Going through the steps to take Christian to his dorm was easy. The hard part was to leave there without our son. I think it was harder for my husband, but we did it.

The next four days we would call Christian but he did not want to talk to us; I think he was having too much fun. Family and friends would call us to see how we were and we were doing just fine. Peter and I spent a lot of time together and we had a good time in Austin. The day came to pick up Christian and we were excited. We got to his room and gathered all his belongings, which were already washed, and sat down to talked to the staff. They also had pictures to show Christian’s activities which they put in an album for us. Everyone said they enjoyed working and playing with Christian.

On our way home Christian, whose speech is very limited, talked about the pool, rides he went on, the boat, and pizza. That was the first time I could understand he was describing things he did in school.

As first timers at Summer Camp, I think it went very well and I hope Christian can attend next summer. Thank you TSBVI for a great summer camp experience.

First Timers?

By Isela Wilson, Parent, Rancho Viejo, TX

Abstract: A mom describes the first time she sends her son with multiple disabilities to an overnight camp. Getting past her anxieties gave her son the opportunity to participate in activities that gave him enjoyment.

Keywords: multiple disabilities, visually impaired, cortical visual impairment, cerebral palsy, life skills, camp.

For those of you thinking about sending your children to TSBVI summer life skills camp and are worried sick that your child will not last the whole week, let me relate our story.

Our son Andrew, now 16 years old, went to camp for the first time ever this past summer. Andrew has Cerebral Palsy and Cortical Visual Impairment. He has a G-Tube, uses a wheelchair, and is nonverbal and totally dependent.

We were nervous wrecks to say the least. The day finally came when we had to leave him. We thought he would be sad; he wasn’t. We thought he would miss us; he didn’t. We thought he would not be taken care of; he was!

Everyone at TSBVI is very professional and well trained on how to handle kids not only with visual impairments but also with multiple disabilities. Their enthusiasm and compassion are visible as soon as you meet them.

Andrew went swimming, on a train ride, and probably his favorite was riding a go cart. He had the time of his life. He learned socialization skills that we could have never taught him. We learned to let go and let others enjoy our son. When we picked him up he was actually upset that we were taking him away from all the fun. When we asked if he would like to go back he shook his head for yes nonstop for about a minute.

So if you are considering sending your son or daughter to life skills camp next year consider this; if your child were a typical kid would you keep him or her from enjoying a camp experience?

I am a parent life skills camp survivor and proud of it!
Abstract: A grandmother shares highlights of the Fourth Annual Texas Chargers Retreat, which was held October 23-25, 2009 at Camp Allen.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, grandparents, CHARGE Syndrome, Texas Chargers, family organization, retreat.

A bright Texas sun and a cool crisp autumn breeze whispering gently through the giant pines of east Texas greeted participants, and provided a beautiful backdrop to the Fourth Annual Texas Chargers Retreat, held on October 23-25, 2009 at Camp Allen, Navasota TX. The facility is located in the midst of the piney woods of east Texas, and as promised, gave a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of participant’s daily life.

Forty families were welcomed with a total of 240 participants. Families were greeted on Friday evening, receiving their welcome bags including t-shirts for each member of their family. A short presentation was made by Kathleen Stremel Thomas, who has worked in the area of communication and language assessment and intervention for children with severe disabilities and deaf-blindness over the past 39 years. Kathleen spoke regarding her research on cochlear implants, and intervention for children who are deaf-blind with cochlear implants. She encouraged parents to participate in the study currently being conducted across the nation. (Editor’s Note: If you are interested in participating in this cochlear implant study, please contact Kathleen Stremel Thomas at <stremelk@wou.edu>, or the Texas Deafblind Project at 512-206-9225).

On Saturday, families attended a several general sessions and breakout sessions designed to meet the special needs of each of the family members, including, fathers, mothers, and grandparents.

Saturday’s general session began with a presentation by David Wiley who spoke about funding and programs available both on state and federal levels to assist families. HIPP, Private Health coverage, SSI, and other resources were discussed and participants were able to field questions regarding obtaining the appropriate resources for each family. This website is a reference for information about the quality of DADS long-term care programs: http://facilityquality.dads.state.tx.us/qrs/public/qrs.do

A presentation was made by Robbie Blaha and David Wiley on the topic of the importance of “Person-Centered Planning.” Lessons gained from the discussion on person-centered planning included reaching out to resources, believing in yourself, and the importance of self-education. It was agreed that patience and perseverance in dealing with the system was key in obtaining the services needed. Use of stories, Bio Poems, and assessments can not only be useful, but are vital in mapping out the goals for CHARGE students. IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) makes parents and caregivers key players in determining the appropriate goals and education methods for their CHARGE child. When planning adult life for individuals with CHARGE, it is important to establish a lifestyle plan, rather than just applying to programs. The use of interveners and extended family support are equally important when planning for in a meaningful adult life.

A parent’s panel openly discussed the joys and challenges of being a CHARGE parent. Questions were presented to each member by a facilitator, and then general questions from the audience were discussed.
During the breakout sessions, each family member was given an opportunity to discuss their questions, thoughts, and challenges pertaining to their role. Sessions were emotional and thought provoking, but left the participants with the knowledge that they were not alone in their struggles or their joys. Family members each bring a special uniqueness and blessing to their CHARGE family member.

Christopher Sense, a 27-year-old senior at Texas Tech University, and a vocal and steadfast Red Raiders fan, spoke to attendees regarding his experiences growing up with CHARGE, including the physical and emotional challenges he has faced. Chris delighted the audience with his PowerPoint presentation, which included the accolades of many personal friends, who remarked on Chris’ tremendous contributions to the world around him. Chris reminded participants that CHARGE does not have to mean limitations, only chances to overcome.

During the various sessions, the children were entertained with games and rides in the sunny outdoors. Fishing tank, bean bag toss, fire truck, and miniature train rides were just a few of the activities provided. Volunteers worked individually with each child and made sure that all of the children, siblings and CHARGErs alike had a fun-filled time.

A full moon and cool temperatures in the evening time made the perfect setting for a Fiesta in the Pines. Spicy Mexican food, music, piñatas, and an old fashioned campfire gave the participants a chance to have fellowship and networking with other families, which made the night memorable to all whom attended.

On Sunday the board met to discuss 2010 retreat plans. With the success of this years retreat it was decided that our 5th Annual Texas Chargers Retreat will be held on November 5-7, 2010, again at the beautiful Camp Allen Center.
TAPVI Talks

By The TAPVI Board

Abstract: This article provides information about TAPVI, a statewide organization for parents of children with vision impairments.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, parent organization, blind, visual impairment , TAPVI, mission, officers , listserv

Editor’s note: In the articles on pages 10-11, two TAPVI members share their experiences sending their sons to overnight camp for the first time. Belonging to a family organization helps parents learn from others who have similar issues, interests, and experiences.

The mission of the Texas Association for Parents of children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) is to provide leadership, support, and training to assist parents in helping children reach their full potential in school and in the community, through workshops and publications.

To connect with other parents, contact any board members below. An application for TAPVI membership can be sent to you.

TAPVI BOARD MEMBERS

President
Michele Chauvin
Sugar Land, TX
832-248-6703
michelechauvin@yahoo.com

President Elect
Isela Wilson (Hable Español)
Rancho Viejo, TX
956-778-1142
Lrwibc@earthlink.net

Secretary
Lynn Novay
Garland, TX
972-768-3368
LMN291@verizon.net

Treasurer
Alma Granado (Hable Español)
Brownsville, TX
512-573-1127
alma.granado@yahoo.com

Membership
Linda Hulett
Houston, TX
lhulett9804@yahoo.com

Newsletter
Christina Silva Suarez (Hable Español)
Harlingen, TX
956-536-5324
melonius3@msn.com

If you want to connect with other parents on the internet through email, join the Texas Visually Impaired Family Network by sending an email to <txvifamily-subscribe@topica.com>. This listserv is limited only to family members of children with a visual impairment living in Texas.
10 Issues to Always Consider When Intervening for Students with Deafblindness

By David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Outreach

Abstract: This article provides a framework for analyzing ten common issues a teacher, intervener, or caregiver must address when effectively supporting a student who is deafblind. Questions are provided to help guide a team in planning the best sensory access for the student in all environments.

Key Words: Effective Practices, deafblind, access, vision, hearing, tactile

A primary role for those intervening with a student who is deafblind is to make accommodations to provide the best possible access to information, spaces, and materials. These accommodations should be planned in advance for the best visual, auditory, and tactile access. This planning is most effectively done as a group including teachers, interveners, related service professionals, the student, family, and other caregivers.

During advanced planning, write strategies that will help the student be more successful when each of the following basic issues are considered, taking into account vision, hearing, and touch:

- physical space – qualities of the room and activity area;
- positioning – where the student, instructor, and materials should be;
- materials – how teaching materials look, sound and feel;
- devices and equipment – adaptive aids used for sensory impairments;
- orientation & mobility – knowing where you are, and getting around;
- communication – getting information from, and giving information to others;
- trust and security – feeling supported, connected, and safe;
- literacy – recording information for future reference, and retrieving recorded information;
- pacing – how quickly the lesson should move forward; and
- content of the activity or coursework – adding to, reducing, or changing what is taught.

It might be easiest to divide a planning sheet into three columns for vision, hearing, and touch, so each is considered for each issue. The strategies developed should help the student access as much information as possible, as easily as possible. This will help the student use his or her energy for learning, rather than trying to figure out what is happening, or what is expected.

Despite the best planning, however, the student and staff will encounter some settings and situations that are new or unexpected, before there is a chance for advance planning. For this reason, those intervening for a student with deafblindness should always have these ten issues in mind in every situation. At the point when making accommodations for these ten issues becomes second nature for the person doing the intervention, the student has the best opportunity to have the fullest access to instruction.

For each of the ten issues, the following are examples of questions that the planning team should consider, and that the person doing the intervention should always keep in mind. Please remember that these are examples, and there are many other things to consider, based on the individual student’s settings, situations, abilities, and challenges.
PHYSICAL SPACE – QUALITIES OF THE ROOM AND ACTIVITY AREA.

*Primary question.* How should the room and activity area look, sound, and be arranged so the student can move freely, easily gather materials, easily access information, and not be distracted by visual, auditory, and tactual clutter?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Is the lighting bright enough, or is there too much glare?
- Does the room decoration create a good visual background?
- How are the acoustics in the room?
- Is there a lot of distracting background noise?
- What kind of furniture is best to help the student be in the best position, and have clear convenient access to learning materials, communication partners, and activity areas?
- Is the workspace clear enough to easily explore tactually, or visually scan?

POSITIONING – WHERE THE STUDENT, INSTRUCTOR, AND MATERIALS SHOULD BE.

*Primary question.* What positions for the student, instructor, and materials would maximize the student’s access to and understanding of information?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Where should the student sit or stand to see and hear most easily?
- Are there specific parts of the room to be avoided because of shadows, glare, or background noise?
- Does the time of day affect what position is best in this setting?
- Does the student need permission to move when necessary to improve his or her ability to see or hear, or to tactually explore what the other students are exploring visually?
- Are materials placed so the student can easily observe or get to them?

MATERIALS – HOW TEACHING MATERIALS LOOK, SOUND AND FEEL.

*Primary question.* Are all teaching materials easy for the student to recognize and use? Consider color, contrast, sound quality, texture, etc. These materials could include anything from a toothbrush to a washer, or a picture symbol to a computer.

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Do learning materials have good color and light/dark contrast when compared to the background, and between the different parts of the materials?
- Are the materials large enough to easily see?
- Do materials have distinctive sound qualities, that make them easy to recognize, or interesting to explore?
- Are tactual elements, such as raised lines and textures, added to reinforce visual materials?
- Whatever possible, are tactile models and symbols made from real objects that are tactually distinctive, rather than plastic replicas?

DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT – ADAPTIVE AIDS USED FOR SENSORY IMPAIRMENTS.

*Primary question.* During the activity, how should the student use any adaptive devices or equipment such as magnifiers, assistive listening devices, electronic Braille notetakers, or switch activated appliances?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- In what situations would magnification be helpful, and which devices would be most effective, efficient, and easy to use?
• Do the student and others in the environment know how to use any amplification, or other sensory devices?
• Are computers, telecommunications equipment, or other tech tools equipped with accessibility features?
• Does the student need help setting up and using devices quickly enough to keep up without missing instruction or other essential information?

**ORIENTATION & MOBILITY – KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE AND GETTING AROUND.**

*Primary question.* What would help the student know where he or she is, be able to find people and things, and go to familiar and unfamiliar destinations?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Are rooms and hallways free of clutter to promote ease of movement?
- Are materials stored in consistent locations that are easy to access?
- Are landmarks for orientation identified or created?
- Has the student learned clear consistent routes to independently move through familiar settings?

**COMMUNICATION – GETTING INFORMATION FROM, AND GIVING INFORMATION TO OTHERS.**

*Primary question.* What strategies would help the student express him or herself to staff or classmates, and what strategies would help staff or classmates be more clearly understood by the student?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Does the person intervening need to learn new vocabulary or create new communication symbols in order to be prepared for a new lesson or activity?
- Which communication partners in any setting can communicate directly with the student, and in which cases is there a need for someone to interpret or facilitate interactions?
- In any situation, does the student have an effective way to communicate both expressively and receptively, and all the materials and equipment necessary to do so?
- Are symbols, devices, and other materials available if necessary for the student to communicate about unexpected concerns or topics?
- Does the student need to switch to different communication strategies based on the situation, such as during group discussions, when the room becomes noisy, or when the lights are dimmed?

**TRUST AND SECURITY – FEELING SUPPORTED, CONNECTED, AND SAFE.**

*Primary question.* What would reduce anxiety for the student, so he or she can feel secure and focus on learning?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- During the activity, how does the student remain connected to someone he or she knows, and with whom he or she has a trusting relationship?
- How does the student know what is about to happen, and what other people’s expectations for the student are?
- Does the student know who else is involved in the activity, and what they are doing?
- Does anything in the situation or activity create confusion or uncertainty for the student, and what can be done to reduce it?
- Does the student need instruction in how to advocate for appropriate modifications, such as asking a teacher or classmate to repeat something, slow down, or change position?
LITERACY – RECORDING INFORMATION FOR FUTURE REFERENCE, AND RETRIEVING-recorded information.

Primary question. What would help the student be able to read or otherwise retrieve recorded information, such as tape recordings, pictures, tactile symbols, object symbols, etc?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- What medium would be most effective in this setting: print, Braille, voice output, pictures, tactile graphics, tactile symbols, object symbols, etc.?
- Is all print easy to read, considering size, color, and type style?
- If the student uses voice output, is there a good listening environment?
- Would the student benefit from headphones or an alternative listening device?
- If the student reads Braille, are Braille materials available in advance?
- When pictures cannot be visually accessed, are tactile graphics or tactile symbols available?

PACING – HOW QUICKLY SHOULD THE LESSON MOVE FORWARD.

Primary question. How do the student’s needs related to vision, hearing, and touch affect the pace at which information is given to the student, how long the student needs to explore materials, and how much time he or she needs to respond?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Before beginning a lesson or activity, is time set aside to allow the student to explore the area, become acquainted with materials, get into proper position, prepare and test equipment, or otherwise assure accessibility?
- Does the student need extra time to orient to a communication partners, especially in a group?
- Is the student given extra time when needed to pause for gathering and/or processing information?
- Are breaks needed to prevent fatigue for the student, or for the person providing intervention?

CONTENT OF THE ACTIVITY OR COURSEWORK – ADDING TO, REDUCING, OR CHANGING WHAT IS TAUGHT.

Primary question. How should the content of the lesson be modified to account for the student’s needs related to vision, hearing, and touch? For example, do demands need to be reduced? In addition to the regular content of the lesson, do other skills (e.g. visual scanning) or information (e.g. background concepts) need to be added?

Examples of other questions to consider:
- Because of the student’s pace, does the amount of work need to be reduced?
- If some of the lesson must be omitted due to time, which elements take priority, and which can be removed?
- Are there concepts in the lesson or activity that are unfamiliar to the student, so that additional explanation or background information must be provided?
- Does the student need pre-teaching before a lesson, or does extra instructional time need to be set aside later to fill in gaps in the students understanding, or to reinforce concepts?
- Do the goals of the activity or instructional methods need to be modified to take into account the student’s sensory needs and capabilities?
- Are activity routines and materials used consistently, so the student can more easily recognize them?
- In addition to subject area content, does the lesson need to include instruction on sensory issues, like how to effectively use vision, hearing, or touch to actively participate in the activity?
By answering such questions in each area, accounting for vision, hearing, and touch, educational teams will provide better intervention for students with deafblindness. Students will have better access to information about the environment, what is happening to around them, and what others are communicating. They will be able to concentrate on learning, rather than struggling to gather information. Access to information and environments is a right.

It is important to keep in mind, the purpose for these accommodations is not to provide a crutch, or make to students dependent on the people providing the intervention. When done well, this intervention will increase students’ independence by providing better access. For that reason, staff people doing the intervention should always be trying to help others in the environment, and the students themselves, be aware of these issues so better access can occur more naturally, even without assistance. This access makes things easier and fairer for everyone involved.

Effectively Working with Para-Educators: Suggestions from the List


Abstract: This article is a compilation of a listserv discussion among teachers of students with visual impairments about working with paraprofessionals. The contributors encourage open communication, comprehensive training, observation and demonstration of skills.

Keywords: visually impaired, paraprofessional, educational support

AER Report Editor’s Note: The following is a portion of an AERNET listserv discussion originated by Missy Garber, Ph.D., Director of the Professional Preparation Program for Teacher of Children with Visual and Multiple Disabilities, Pennsylvania College of Optometry.

The goal of this electronic mailing list exchange was to gather suggestions from the field regarding strategies for working effectively with paraeducators who serve students with blindness/visual impairment. The list of suggestions will be used as a starting point for further discussion with graduate students working towards certification as TVIs, and it is but one component of a personnel preparation grant objective aimed at enhancing preparation of TVIs in the area of effective collaboration with paraeducators (Online Specialized Personnel Increases Through Collaborative Efforts, funded through Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education grant #H325K052259).

Dr. Garber received six responses, posted them to the list, and asked for comments or additions. A supplementary post was offered by Ayala Bal-

londonoff, MS ED., CTVI, Teacher of Blind/VI, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District who is a PCO graduate and OL SPICE advisory board member.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PARAEDUCATORS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS: SUGGESTIONS FOR TVIS FROM AERNET SUBSCRIBERS

Compilation posted by Missy Garber:

- Make sure the paraeducator has an opportunity to read the student’s IEP.
- Provide inservices for school staff and classmates and include a discussion of issues related to independence for students who are visually impaired.
• Schedule sessions in which paraeducator observes you working with the student.
• Be clear with the paraeducator about your expectations for your students.
• Provide training to paraprofessional in Braille, especially as it relates to interlining assignments.
• Provide training to paraeducator in relevant technologies as well as how to seek and use technology support.
• Pool your knowledge with the paraeducator. He or she has day-to-day knowledge of a particular student.
• Schedule sessions with paraeducator in which she demonstrates her way of presenting activities to students.
• Request that the student’s IEP team provide justification for the need of a paraeducator.
• Approach the assignment of a paraeducator as temporary.
• Develop with the IEP team an independence plan for student. Review each subject area of inclusion and student level of need for support in each area. Use targeted goals for independence-building.
• Invite the paraeducator to attend workshops, training sessions, and conferences with you.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PARAEDUCATORS

Posted by Ayala Ballonoff, MsS. ED., CTVI:

Some weeks ago, Missy Barber posted a list of suggestions for working with paraprofessionals. Paraprofessional training is something I’ve given a lot of thought to, and I imagine every TVI and special education teacher will need to address in some form. I looked over the suggestions and wanted to add some thought on the topic.

I actually started in education as a paraprofessional, and I’ve met, worked with, and observed many through the years. In the best case scenario, a paraprofessional can be your right hand, right arm and right brain! In the worst case, a paraprofessional can be like the last person on the island with you on Survivor! Her are some suggestions based on my experiences:

• Meet with the paraprofessional early in the year, or before school starts. Listen to their concerns, experiences and review their job description. Present your expectations and address their concerns.
• Find out what, if any, other staff responsibilities they may have and how that will impact the VI case load. In various schools, paraprofessionals are assigned to lunch duty, bus duty, other direct work with students, bookroom and other office-related tasks. You may need to get clarification from the principal or department head on the paraprofessional’s availability.
• Find out if there are any union-imposed restrictions (or building or district restrictions) on what the paraprofessional can do.
• If possible, give the paraprofessionals their own desks.
• If there is undesirable work to be done, work with the paraprofessional to get the job done. Let them see that is is not “beneath you” to do such things. If you work with young or multi-handicapped students, let the paraprofessionals see you get down on the floor with children, get wet, dirty or be physically active with the kids.
• Discuss with the paraprofessional your expectations for contact with parents or other staff who are not directly involved with the student. Parents who are interested in their child’s progress may ask the paraprofessional about progress, concerns, etc. Make a plan for how to communicate with parents. Review any written correspondence between paraprofessional and parents. You might create a multiple-choice checklist, or other teacher created tool for interaction between paraprofessional and parents if problems persist in written communications.
The Ever-important “Pause”
Lyn Ayer, Director, Oregon Deafblind Project

This article was originally published in the Oregon Deafblind Project newsletter, in the Summer 2009, Fall 2009, and Winter 2009 issues.

Abstract: The author discusses the importance of “wait time” as a strategy to encourage communication and participation when interacting with individuals with deafblindness or multiple disabilities.

Keywords: deafblind, blind, communication, pause, wait time.

Have you ever thought that our lives are made up of a series of pauses? We need to pause when we cross the street, or do a crossword puzzle, eat or drink, sing or dance - or just THINK. A PAUSE is also a major “tool” to ensure that children with deafblindness or multiple severe disabilities have the opportunity to understand, to respond, and to be motivated to listen.

“Rests” are pauses in a piece of music - and these can vary in length, some being simply take-a-breath-type of pauses. Without these, the music will sound different and will be really difficult to play or sing - like stringing together a whole lot of words in one long sentence or several. Difficult to read or understand! So the “silences” - or pauses - provide meaning and sense. Dance is comprised of movement - and PAUSES between movements. And then we have this button on our equipment – (pause) – and we know how to use it.

A pause in speech is used to achieve some “effect”. We pause because we are trying to gather our thoughts and match these to what we are saying, or to emphasize a point, or to give listeners a chance to absorb what we are saying. Having a conversation with someone who talks non-stop is not just annoying, but we will probably not understand the communication. We need to think, breathe, leave a gap where another person can “jump in”. We also need to be aware of how to pause in the right place, and how long to pause — since these vary between languages, cultures, or even areas of a country such as the USA.

With a child who has deafblindness or multiple disabilities some of the reasons we need to pause are:

• To give a child time ADDITIONAL TIME to take in what was “said” in the first place - AND to allow this to happen uninterrupted
• So that there is time for a response (from the child), no matter how subtle it is
• To encourage the child to be a part of this “conversation”
• To find interests in common — and therefore, motivator.
• So, train yourself. PAUSE!

It’s a Matter of Time

Have you ever “lost your voice”? It’s a frustrating experience. Here are some of the things that happened to me:

• I could not respond when someone addressed me – not in a conventional way
• I tried to “mouth” words – but most people around me couldn’t lipread – and either misunderstood me, or did not get what I was saying
• I gestured and waved my arms more than usual – and also attempted to put body language and facial expression to better use
• I looked for a pen and paper – but found that people around me wouldn’t wait for me to write things down
• I lost control of many things around me – like checking the kids, sharing with my husband what happened during my day, ordering pizza over the phone.

• Most of all – I found that I wore down the patience of those around me!

Each one of us is so accustomed to running around and doing things quickly, that it becomes difficult to slow down, and to WAIT for someone who cannot keep up. It would have helped if people around me had:

1. given me more TIME to express what I was trying to express
2. allowed me to use alternatives and taken the TIME to understand these
3. Given me TIME to chat – via the written word (inevitably slower… whether hand-written, or on a computer).
4. Understood the “time = patience” formula!

Transfer what happened to me to a child who is deafblind or has multiple severe disabilities – and you will find that issues are not that different:

• A child may not have conventional speech or language - but the urge to communicate is embedded in our very being. So - take time to learn how a child communicates - or teach a child how to do this.

• STOP and watch - and see if you can detect subtle, and not-so-subtle communications - the blink of the eyes, stilling of the body, lift of a single finger, a smile or frown, a bounce or a stomp.

• A child may have an unconventional system that is being used – objects, pictures, touch cues – and we need to tap into these and make sure we use them – even when it takes more time.

• Provide the child with more “control” just by waiting for a response to each thing you say – or do. Being able to participate in the give-and-take of a conversation provides satisfaction.

• STOP. Take TIME. PAUSE. Learn PATIENCE!

PAUSES IN MASSAGE

Anyone who has been trained in giving infant and child massage, or instructing parents on how to do this, will know how important pauses are in this routine. Before the routine begins, there is a sequence of events – and pauses:

• The child learns that s/he is transitioning from what they were doing – to the massage routine. The person tells the child this through voice, sign, gesture, or other cue.

• This cuing may need a pause after – or even a repetition of the same information, while the child is being moved to the location for massage.

• Then, from the child’s viewpoint, there is a longer pause – while the massager makes sure that everything is in place – clean sheet or blanket for the floor, massage oil, towels, aromatherapy materials (for some), music (for some). This is “mental” prep time for the child as well!

• Then the massager “asks permission” of the infant or child. For some children, the massager may just put oil on her hands, rub them together, and be sure the child is aware of her doing his.

• Another short pause - for the infant or child to process this information and to respond. If the experience has been enjoyable in the past, there will be a response after the pause! Usually it is a “happy” response.

Now for the massage process itself:

• The first massage stroke incorporates a pause too. The massager places his/her hands on the child’s body and just “rests” there for a second of two.
• The massage usually begins with one leg – and several different strokes for the one leg. There is a brief pause between each stroke. After all the strokes for the one leg are done, there is another pause while the massager just holds the child’s leg without doing anything. This pause will indicate to the child that that leg is “done” – and the massager will be transitioning to the other leg.

• The massage continues to the other leg, each arm, abdomen, chest, back, face – and each segment has the same or similar sequence for pausing.

• When the massage ends, it ends like it began, with the last stroke incorporating a pause – while the massager “rests” his/her hands on the child’s body.

Massage would not be the same – or have the same benefits – if the pauses and rests were not a part of the sequence. It cannot be rushed through. The pauses are really important because of their communicative value as well.

THE CONCEPTS OF “WAIT-TIME” AND “THINK-TIME...”

The concept of “wait time” as an instructional variable was invented by Mary Budd Rowe (1972). The “wait-time” periods she found were periods of silence that followed teacher questions and students’ completed responses that rarely lasted more than 1.5 seconds in typical classrooms. She discovered, however, that when these periods of silence lasted at least 3 seconds, many positive things happened to students’ and teachers’ behaviors and attitudes.

Courtesy of Joni Courtney from the Arkansas Deafblind Project. Complete article at: http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/pages/1884.shtml

PAUSES IN ROUTINES

Build pauses into routines that are “scripted” for the children you work with! This works like a road-map, when you take into consideration the signs along the way that say “stop” or “yield” or something similar. The pauses that are scripted should:

• Be part of a natural routine—where a pause can become a natural prompt

• Include an embedded communication routine

• Involve peers and others

• Begin with the pause time needed – and be faded to shorter pause times

• Be motivating to a child – and make him/her feel included and successful.

Arrival time routine:
Gina gets off bus.
Stacie greets her and pauses.
Gina responds with a lift of her right hand.
Stacie cues her, “Let’s go!”. Pauses.
“Are you ready?” Pause.
Gina rubs wheel of wheelchair to say “OK”.
Stacie pushes wheelchair.
They meet the “greeter” (a classmate) at the door.
Greeter offers a Hi-five. Pauses with hand in position where Gina can reach.
Gina, “Hi-fives” back.
Greeter opens door and Stacie wheels Gina inside.
Stacie turns Gina around to face greeter again and says, “Thank you, Beth”. Pauses.
Gina says “thank you” by hitting her switch.
Stacie takes Gina to the classroom. Pauses at the door.
Gina reaches for “greeting switch” and says “Hello, I’m here” as she goes in.
Gina pauses — and someone in the classroom responds, “Hello Gina!”
Tips On Toilet Training For The Child With Visual Impairments

By Holly Allen, Early Childhood Vision Consultant (ECVC), CNIB North Region, Thunder Bay, Ontario

Abstract: Advice on helping children with visual impairments learn to use the toilet and stop wearing diapers. The author emphasizes imitation, direct instruction, positive praise and natural consequences.

Key Words: toilet training, visually impaired, blind

Author’s Note: Much of the information in this tip sheet was gleaned from this resource: Living and Learning with Blind Children by Felicity Harrison and Mary Crow, University of Toronto Press, March 1993.

• The child should be developmentally ready to toilet train and have an adequate level of communication skills. Signs of readiness include that the child can indicate when he or she needs a diaper change and most often will wake up dry from a nap. Children who do not have additional disabilities should be independently mobile.

• A comfortable and stable potty in the bathroom works best for smaller children. When using the adult bathroom be sure the hole is not too big, (use a toilet ring) and the child has a stool to place the feet on for stability and security. It will be very difficult for a child to relax and accomplish this task if worried about falling in or off the toilet.

• Allow the child multiple occasions to be in the room when a sibling or other child uses the toilet. Give the other child a lot of congratulations for using the potty. Talk about it as though it is a wonderful thing!

• Children with severe vision loss may have unique concerns about how the adult toilet works. In this case a child may benefit from a special learning opportunity with adult guidance to check out tactually an especially well cleaned toilet in order to be reassured that the body products are not somehow being magically “disappeared”. For if this is the case a child may well be concerned that the same thing could happen to a person when he or she is sitting on the toilet. Adults may need to go this extra distance to reassure the child how the toilet actually works and so alleviate any unspoken fears around this issue.

• The child should wear regular underwear and clothing that is easily pulled down, for example elastic waist shorts or pants. Do not use diapers or pull ups during the day time as the child will not know the feeling of being wet.

• It is a good idea to try to stay home to work on toilet training for at least a week, so that your child has lots of opportunities to practice. If attempts at toilet training are scattered throughout a long period of time it is much harder for the child to make the connection between the sensations of their body and the required steps in toileting. It does not sound like the ideal way to spend a week, however doing so will provide the child with ample opportunities to make the connections necessary.

• Toilet training is more easily accomplished outdoors in the back yard in nice weather wearing light summer clothing which makes for less laundry. When the child can actually feel the wet coming down their leg they will have a better chance of making the connection between the sensation of a full bladder, the act of peeing, and the words you will use to let them know what is happening.

• When inside the house you may want to cover furniture with towels and/or plastic. Soaker or cloth training pants that are more absorbent than regular underwear can also be used indoors. The child will still feel wet, but less of the mess will get on the floor or furniture. You want the child to feel uncomfortable with having the wet clothes, and also to have the
hassle of having to change clothing. The child may have to experience this many times before they realize it is less bother to use the toilet, than to wet/soil their pants.

• Give the child plenty to drink. Popsicles are also a good idea.

• Watch the child carefully for signs he/she is about to go. Have the child sit on the potty/toilet for short periods of 5 to 10 minutes. Supervise at all times. You may want to try reading a story about going potty at this time.

• When the child becomes wet in their clothing remark “_____ you have gone pee. Your pants are wet. Let’s go to the potty/toilet.” Sit the child on the potty and help the child to change the wet clothes. Talk about “Soon you will pee on the potty/toilet like ______.” It may take many instances of wet/dirty clothing before the child starts to make the connection between the body sensations and the potty/toilet. When in the dry clothing, talk about how nice and comfortable it is to be dry.

• It is very important that caregivers not show any anger or disappointment about the wetting or soiling of clothing. Some children with visual impairments start to feel that the actual act of peeing or having a BM is “bad” so may then attempt to hold everything in. Be sure that your child does not receive negative feedback over wetting or soiling their clothing during the toilet training. Be calm and matter of fact at all times. Creating stress for the child will not lead to success. Encouragement and support is required.

• When your child has some success on the potty, break out the band! Over-praise the success. Sing a potty song, praise the child, provide lots of excitement. A good potty song can be sung to the tune of the “Mexican Hat Dance” as in “Oh ____ went pee on the potty. He really went pee on the potty, Oh ____ went pee on the potty, we will all sing to ____hur-ray!” Call familiar people on the phone and have the child tell about their potty success. Make sure your child overhears you telling others about the potty success. Some parents will let their child have a sticker, or candy treat on the first occasions of success.

• One family had success using a tin pail with the potty seat on top of it initially. The child really enjoyed the noise when the pee hit the empty pail. The mom in this case also used a clean shampoo bottle with warm water to squirt into the pail to make the noise for the child who soon realized he could make this noise himself by letting go of his urine. Once this habit was developed it was relatively easy to switch to the regular toilet.

• Stress, illness or other changes can cause training to go off the rails. When possible go back to the above steps and continue the process.

• Remember that patience, time and rewards will make the process easier for everyone!

Integrating Expanded Core Curriculum Activities Into Academic Instruction

by Elizabeth Eagan, CTVI, Houston Independent School District

Abstract: Expanded Core Curriculum instruction can be integrated into standard academic instruction and routine daily tasks, with planning and support including the itinerant vision teacher, classroom teacher, and parents.

Keywords: blind, visually impaired, education, expanded core curriculum.

“The grass is always greener on the other side” I often heard growing up. But is it? Is the grass only greener on the other side because the person on the other side knows what fertilizer to buy, when to water their grass, when to mow, what weed killer to use, etc? Why not learn from the
expert on the other side so that my grass will be just as green? In order for students with visual impairments to learn from the expert on greener grass, they must first be given the tools to do so. These students need to have in their tool box an arsenal of strategies and competencies to aid them on their road of green grass discovery.

Having a tool box is vital to students with visual impairments because they need to be taught the skills that normally sighted individuals learn through the power of observation. What is learned through observation, imitation, and feedback from the adult will go unnoticed by students with visual impairments. The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) gives these students a list of competencies and strategies for fulfilling them.

Students with visual impairments need to be able to communicate effectively; being able to hear what has been said is equally as important as relaying one’s thoughts to others. If others don’t hear what has been said, then the message has been lost. Knowing where and how to get to the stores to buy the fertilizer, how to comparison price shop, how to read the directions on the fertilizer, what equipment is needed to use the fertilizer, and then enjoying the grass once it is greener with friends and family are all vitally important.

The ECC includes skills that are not part of the core curriculum of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Without this expanded core, a student with a visual impairment is not able to actively participate in the world. Without learning banking skills, for example a student may think money just magically appears to anyone out of a machine on a wall. These students must learn the process that leads up to the ATM giving you money.

For every subject taught in school there is a way to tie it into the ECC. For example, when looking at the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) objectives for 4th grade:

§110.6. English Language Arts and Reading (4.15) Writing/purposes: The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes, and in a variety of forms. (F) The student is expected to choose the appropriate form for his/her own purpose for writing, including journals, letters, reviews, poems, narratives, and instructions (4-5).

The objective is clearly defined. Educators simply need to review the nine ECC areas individually and consider how one might incorporate them. Following is an example of how I have incorporated the nine ECC areas in this TEKS objective.

- **Assistive Technology**
  The student will utilize a computer or note taking device to write reviews after reading books. The student writes the reviews as a newspaper critic, a book jacket review, an Amazon website review, etc.

- **Compensatory**
  The student will write poetry utilizing the different parts of speech and punctuation correctly. Students will utilize free verse, diamante poems, etc.

- **Career Education/Transition**
  Invite a journalist from the local paper to talk with the student about writing as a career path. Get with classroom teacher to arrange this activity for entire class or as a pull out activity.

- **Independent Living Skills**
  The student will be assigned a pen pal with a similar visual disability at another campus or in another town. Letters will be exchanged via email or US mail.

- **Orientation and Mobility**
  The student will keep a travel journal of different routes, contacts, and businesses visited throughout the school year. Collaborate with O&M instructor.

- **Recreation and Leisure**
  The student will start a diary of thoughts, poetry, or whatever the student wishes as
a means to put ones thoughts to paper. The student will be assured that only the pages the student wishes to share will be viewed.

- **Self-determination**
  The student will write a letter to a city councilman, state representative, senator, etc. of their choice vocalizing a personal of any type, ranging from accessibility to crime.

- **Social Interaction Skills**
  The student will create an address book or use a commercial one (APH’s EZ Track Address Book) gathering phone numbers of friends, family, local business, and other persons of interest. Business cards should be included for future reference.

- **Visual Efficiency Skills**
  The student will edit a selected written passage for misspellings and punctuation errors. I have given the student a passage I have created, or one from another student, as well as working on editing his or her own work.

Begin work from the student’s comfort level and gradually increase the complexity. Include the parents and classroom teachers as much as possible. One of my favorite activities is to have my students interview their parents on how they do a task. This gives the students an opportunity to see their parents as the expert and to learn from them.

Teaching the ECC is a joint effort by all on the educational team. Collaboration with the classroom teacher is vital in assisting the student to be a well-rounded individual on the road to independence. Learning what TEKS objectives, units, and activities are upcoming in academic classes is an excellent way to brain storm with the teacher on ways to incorporate the ECC into the curriculum. Recruiting parents and other family members to assist with activities where they feel comfortable is icing on the cake. This provides the family a chance to be the experts as well as continuing their role as a life-long support system.

The grass on the other side of the fence isn’t just greener; the owner’s of the grass is merely more knowledgeable due to their vast number of experiences. Once the student with a visual impairment gains knowledge due to numerous experiences, his or her grass will be greener, and become the envy of the neighborhood.

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**Fitness and Recreational Activities or Youth and Adults with Visual Impairments**

By: Joe Paschall, Athletic Director, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: Physical fitness and recreational activities are important for individuals with visual impairments. Suggestions for activities and modifications to support access are discussed.

Keywords: visually impaired, fitness, physical education, recreation.

Almost any fitness or recreational activity can be adapted for individuals with visual impairments, and some don’t require any adaptations at all. Several items to consider are accessibility to facilities, equipment, and transportation. One way to support success in this area, is to research these transportation and accessibility issues before attempting to participate in activities.

I will begin by discussing fitness. This is an area of concern for many young people and adults with visual impairments. There are many ways to build physical fitness. This can be done at home, in local gyms, and other community facilities. Working out at home is difficult for some individuals. However, making the workout environment more interesting or entertaining can help the workouts.
Music or television can keep people engaged. Consistency is another important factor; having a routine schedule will help tremendously.

Many fitness activities can be done in the home. Stretching routines are the easiest. The individual needs only a mat. The routine can last from 30 to 40 minutes and stretch most parts of the body. Stretching also reinforces awareness of range of motion. Some individuals are amazed at how their bodies can move. Having a therapy ball is great. There are many hand and arm motions which can be done with a ball which can help increase your heart rate. Hand weights can build muscle tone. Sometimes people are concerned about muscles becoming too large. Doing a twenty-minute workout with light hand weights can tone the muscles, but not increase mass. Yoga, is another activity that is not intense, but has many benefits. Yoga can release stress, which in turn will help physically through relaxation exercises.

Most communities have local workout facilities. In local workout gyms, as long as the individual with a visual impairment is oriented to the equipment and facility correctly, he or she is able to work out successfully independently. However, I have heard some instances where these individuals are denied access. Being properly trained may help this challenge. Most communities have walking trails in their local parks. They are usually easy to access. Finding a walking partner is usually not difficult. Having this type of commitment helps both partners keep to their activity schedule, and helps them stay healthy.

When choosing recreational activities for youth or adults with visual impairments, the sky is the limit. I have taken students scuba diving, rock climbing, ice skating, water skiing, snow skiing, cycling, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, golfing, bowling, and many other activities. Only a few of these need minor adaptations. The key to success is advanced planning and exposure to equipment before attempting the activity. I have drafted lesson plans for many of these activities and would be happy to share them with anyone interested. If you would like, contact me via e-mail at <JoePaschall@TSBVI.edu>.

In closing, providing these opportunities for individuals with visual impairments just takes a little extra work and creativity. However, the outcome can help these individuals gain self confidence, and a multitude of additional benefits.

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**Work Is Important**

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

**Abstract**: In this article, Superintendent Daugherty discusses “career education,” “vocational education,” and the need for young people to develop work skills and behaviors at an early age.

**Key Words**: blindness, visual impairment, disability, career education, vocational education, TSBVI, DARS Division for Blind Services, work skills, work interests.

The concept of Career Education is an outgrowth of what we had for many years called Vocational Education. “Voc Ed” was about getting the skills needed to perform a specific job, and Career Education came about to take a broader view that included student interests and more generalized job-getting and job-keeping skills. With the employment rate of adults with visual impairments alarmingly low, we all have to continue to reevaluate what we are doing in order to ensure that...
young people are in the best position possible to have shot at a rewarding career, a job that pays the bills, or whatever it is that allows them to do at least these three important things: 1) make a contribution to the collective work effort of society; 2) have a network of friends and co-workers that add value to our work hours and our leisure hours; and 3) have your own money. I say these three things because it is what motivates me to do what I do, and it seems hold up well as I think about the motivations of those I know and work with.

Right now in my circle there is a lot of discussion about the relative values of more generalized job-getting and job-keeping skills in areas of interest (Career Education), and more specific job skill training around interests and aptitudes (Vocational Education). I suspect that the outcome of these discussions will lead us somewhat back in the direction of specific skills training around jobs that are available in the market, and that the student in question can—and is willing to—do. I believe that one of the best avenues to the loftier career (not just a job) path is actually doing something someone is willing to give you money for. In my young adulthood I had a job where I became extremely competent at cleaning toilets. From that I developed speed and efficiency and a sense of pride over a job well done. I also developed a strong belief that I did not want to make that my life’s work, although to this day I have very high regard and respect for those who do the job.

But any move toward revising how we approach preparing students for their role as a worker doing a specific job should also include what we have learned about the concept of a career—that getting paid for doing something we love is better than pay alone. And if we want to keep getting paid for doing something we enjoy, we have to attend to what is valued in the workplace. Showing up on time, organizing around tasks, and fitting into the workplace with how we look and how we act are the basic tenets around which we have organized our career education activities. The importance of these things will never change. These are not taught in shop class. And by the way, as a completely random aside, the best diesel mechanic I have ever met was a blind man whose daughter attended TSBVI. I guess it’s pretty clear that I’m saying specific vocational training and career education are both needed, and more of it on all fronts.

Joint TSBVI/DARS-DBS programs like SWEAT (Summer Work Experience In Austin Texas) are excellent ways to help young people prepare for work, but if participation as a teenager in programs like these is the first significant exposure to work skills and behaviors, then that’s very late in the game. It’s best to start early with chores at home. Doing them regularly is more important than what the child is actually doing. Watch carefully for interests and aptitudes and build upon them. I’m imagining that a few of the successful visually impaired document shredding entrepreneurs we’ve met over the years who now have their own businesses all began with actions around the home (rip!) that might not have been initially viewed as productive. As with my toilet cleaning experience I alluded to earlier, I’m a big fan of everyone starting with work that is not glamorous, but is instead sweaty and dirty and maybe even boring. Learn to do it well, and you may find you like it; you may also find that your success can be applied to something else you’d rather be doing.

With the employment rate of adults with visual impairments alarmingly low, we all have to continue to reevaluate what we are doing in order to ensure that young people are in the best position possible to have shot at a rewarding career...
High Expectations and Your Child’s Future

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

Abstract: This article helps parents understand the power of high expectations for their child who is blind or visually impaired, and the important role that high expectations play in preparing their child to live and work independently as an adult.

Key Words: blind, visually impaired, DARS-Division for Blind Services, DBS, high expectations, self-determination, job candidate, job applicant, employer, business

DARS-Division for Blind Services (DBS) provides services that help our youngest consumers achieve positive self-determination, because we know that a strong sense of self-determination leads to personal independence as an adult.

Self-determination in a child is an ongoing process because her world changes as she grows. At first, a child’s daily experiences revolve around herself. Then she starts exploring the world around her. And, finally, she sees her world in terms of her relationships with different people, events, and things.

Have you ever heard that old question that asks which came first, the chicken or the egg? Well, when we look at children, we have to ask if their world shapes their self-determination or if their self-determination shapes their world. Ultimately, we have to realize that the answer to both our questions is “yes.”

If a child who is blind or visually impaired is excused from participating in the events around him, he will see the world as a series of events that excludes him and he will probably grow up feeling the world determines who and what he can become. But, if the same child acquires strong adaptive skills and a curiosity about his world that drives him to participate in new experiences, he quickly learns that his eye condition doesn’t have to limit what he experiences and it doesn’t have to control the experiences in which he can participate. In other words, he learns that he is in charge of his own self-determination and he acknowledges that the only things that can limit his future are the boundaries of his own imagination.

Is there a key element that promotes the development of strong adaptive skills and leads to a positive sense of self-determination? Yes, and that key element is high expectations. But where do high expectations come from?

Because parents are the center of a child’s world, high expectations must start in the home. Family activities should support the child’s participation. Assign household chores and positively reinforce the child for completing those chores. Stress the importance of school and academic pursuits. Promote opportunities for your child to explore real-life experiences through sports, hobbies, and other areas in which they show interest.

As your child grows, talk to her about her interests and help her learn more about different choices. Encourage her to participate in school, community, and volunteer activities. Promote opportunities to explore different occupational choices by talking to people in various work environments.
Help your child learn to make independent decisions -- the good decisions will promote self-confidence and even the not-so-wonderful decisions will often provide important lessons about adversity and resilience.

The services available through the DBS Blind Children’s Program are designed to build a foundation of high expectations and a strong sense of self-determination in each child we serve. Transition services for older children and teenagers will build on these values and concepts. Group skills training and opportunities to participate in learning activities with peers strengthen the young person’s internal sense of high expectations and expand his or her view of the world. These experiences stress the value of self-exploration (what do I want to be when I grow up?) and the self-confidence to make good personal decisions (what skills and educational requirements do I need to be well prepared for the future I want?).

In summary, continuous reinforcement of high expectations throughout a child’s growing years supports development of a strong and very individualized sense of self-determination. Young adults who understand the importance (and rewards!) of work are in a position to seek out the employment option that is best suited to them. Equally important, an employer who is looking for a well-qualified job candidate will easily see the strengths a skilled, motivated job applicant will bring to the business goals the employer needs to achieve.

At DBS, the summer of 2010 will offer a number of exciting learning experiences for our younger consumers. In Lubbock, the annual Project SWEEP (Summer Work Experience and Empowerment Program) will serve 20-25 youth from the Great Plains region, and in Austin the SWEAT (Summer Work Experience in Austin Texas) Program serves youth in the Austin area. During these five-week vocational programs, participants reside in the dorms at Texas Tech University or at TSBVI and gain practical work experience in a paying job in the community. The first week of both programs is devoted to developing job readiness skills, such as completing applications, interviewing skills, appropriate attire, and career exploration. During the last four weeks, participants work at paying jobs in the community. Residential staff is available in the afternoons and overnight, and many independent living skills activities are offered in the evenings.

Other areas in Texas also have summer work experience or career exploration programs, both residential and non-residential. For example:

- Camp Dream in Dallas, an overnight summer camp that provides career exploration, portfolio and resume development, mentorship and job shadowing opportunities, and training in independent living skills.
- El Paso Summer Youth Employment Program, a joint project with DRS, Upper Rio Grande Work Force Solutions and Volar Independent Living Center, provides job readiness training, paid work experience, and job coaches as needed.
- Bay Area Opportunity Center Summer Work in conjunction with DBS provides training in completing applications, developing a resume, interviewing skills, and work experience in a chosen field of interest.
- Austin Application Required, a joint project between DBS Transition and Region 13 ESC, provides job readiness training as well as paid work experience.

These are just a few of the work experience and career exploration programs available this summer. DBS also offers a variety of camp experiences where students can develop confidence and independent living skills. Contact your DBS Transition Counselor or Children’s Specialist for more information about summer opportunities available in your region.

These activities will promote all the critical factors discussed in this article and help our consumers acquire new skills and new information that will increase their knowledge of how their world works and how they can achieve their own personal success now and in the future!
**Morgan’s Wonderland Grand Opening**

Information excerpted from www.morganswonderland.com

**Abstract:** This article provides an update on the grand opening of Morgan’s Wonderland, the world’s largest park for children and adults with special needs.

**Key Words:** blindness, visual impairment, deafblind, disability, accessibility, special needs, Morgan’s Wonderland, park, recreation

Morgan’s Wonderland, the world’s largest park for children and adults with special needs, will open gradually, starting in February with a limited number of visitors so they can make improvements to the park before the Grand Opening on April 10. This “soft opening” gives the park the best opportunity to continually improve upon their guest service skills while still providing a quality experience for their guests. Even during the Soft Opening phase, all guests will be required to pre-register online before visiting. Go to <https://registration.morganswonderland.com> to pre-register.

The Grand Opening is April 10th. This is the first official day of operation, and they will have festivities and special activities on that date to commemorate this historic event. Make your plans now to visit this exceptional facility. <http://www.morganswonderland.com/Morgans-Wonderland-Grand-Opening-Countdown.html>.

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**The Buzz on Summer Jobs**

By Linda Johnson, Transition Consultant, Division for Blind Services

**Abstract:** This article provides hints for youth looking for summer employment.

**Key Words:** blindness, visual impairment, disability, summer employment, Texas Workforce Commission, DARS Division for Blind Services, Transition services

You say you’re at least sixteen? You’d like some work experience? And you’d especially like a little money in your pocket?

That first summer job can cause some tummy jitters, but this first trek into the world of work is also exciting. Here are some resources and ideas to help you along the way.

First of all, contact your DBS Transition Counselor who will have much more information, local resources and contacts to help you on your journey. The DBS Transition Program assists young people who are blind or visually impaired to make an effective transition from secondary school to adult life and the world of work, and to make informed decisions about their future goals.

Consumers and their families are provided with opportunities for career exploration; opportunities to gain work experience while in high school; training in skills needed to achieve their goals; feedback about the consumer’s current academic, vocational, and independent living skills; and adaptive tools to achieve their goals.

Next, find your local Texas Workforce Center, <www.twc.state.tx.us/dirs/wdas/wdamap.html>, and register with the Youth Employment Specialist. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the state government agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers of Texas. For job seekers, TWC offers career development information, job search resources, and training.
programs. Services are provided on a regional level by 28 local workforce boards. This network gives customers access to local workforce solutions and statewide services in a single location—Texas Workforce Centers. Many local workforce boards develop programs specifically to provide summer employment opportunities for youth. Primary services of the Texas Workforce Commission and our network partners are funded by federal tax revenue and are generally free to all Texans.

To find out more about youth services available with Texas Workforce, go to: <www.twc.state.tx.us/svcs/youthinit/youth_links.html>. And for lots of resources and information about employment and youth with disabilities, go to National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth: <www.ncwd-youth.info>.

I wish you a very profitable and productive summer!

Summer Camp – Already?
By Beth Dennis, Blind Children’s Consultant, Division for Blind Services

Abstract: This article provides information about summer camps.

Key Words: blind, vision impairment, recreation, summer camp

Here is your winter reminder about summer camp. Yes, I know in some places there’s still snow on the ground and you haven’t put up your holiday decorations, but now’s the time to plan for summer activities. Many summer camps have already mailed informational brochures and applications, and application deadlines may be as early as mid-April. The most popular summer camps fill up early, and some camps operate on a first come first served basis.

Residential summer camps provide students excellent opportunities to learn new skills and practice old ones. In addition to just plain, old-fashioned fun, students develop confidence, independence and social skills. Some camps offer shorter camp sessions or day-camp programs for younger campers who are not yet ready to be away from home for an entire week.

Here are some things to keep in mind:
1. Be aware of camp deadlines. By Spring Break, make sure you have made a final camp selection.
2. Call early (January or February) to request a camp application form. Some forms take longer to complete and may require a medical release signed by your child’s doctor.
3. Talk to other parents, teachers of the visually impaired, TCB children's caseworkers, or transition counselors about the camp you are considering for your child. Visit the camp’s website or, if possible, consider a visit to the camp in the off-season.

In January and February, the Division for Blind Services obtains updated camp information from camps in Texas that have served campers with visual and other impairments. Please contact your DBS Specialist or your local DBS office for camp information: <www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/DBSoffices.asp>. DBS does not maintain a list of all the camps in Texas, and the inclusion or exclusion of a camp should not be considered an endorsement of any particular camp. When selecting a camp, parents should visit the facility, meet the camp director or counselors, and talk to parents whose children have attended the camp in past years. Each camp has its own special attributes and no single camp is the “best” for every child. Trying to match the needs of your child with a camp that will meet those needs should be a leading consideration. Careful research will ultimately result in an informed decision to find the camp that is the "best" for your child.
The Global Explorer’s Experience

Excerpted from www.globalexplorers.org home page

Abstract: This article describes Global Explorers, a nonprofit organization that provides a comprehensive educational travel experience for students of all abilities and backgrounds.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, disability, Global Explorers, travel

Global Explorers is a mission-driven nonprofit organization, unique in the student travel industry. They are a nonprofit organization driven by their passion for sharing the most educational and life-changing travel experiences available. As a nonprofit, their programs offer a comprehensive, responsible travel experience designed to genuinely enhance the lives of their participants in the most meaningful way possible. Their nonprofit commitment is a promise that:

- Education is always the guiding principle. Read their Core Disciplines for details.
- They give back to the communities through service, cross-cultural exchange activities, and financial and technical support.
- They will never cut corners or sacrifice quality for financial gain.
- They are committed to helping students of all abilities and backgrounds experience the natural wonders and cultural diversity of our world.
- They can receive grants and donations to support and offset the costs of their programs. Your group can receive tax-deductible donations from your community to help contribute to your program fees.
- They are governed by a talented Board of Directors consisting of experts such as teachers, principals, travel experts and scientists.
- Volunteers contribute thousands of hours of work to support their mission.
- Every staff member, volunteer, guide, and scientist with Global Explorers cares deeply about the mission and shares their dedication to positively changing the entire student travel industry.

This is no ordinary student travel experience. No other travel organization requires extensive educational preparation prior to travel as well as a follow-up service leadership project after travel. Their interdisciplinary preparatory curriculum prepares students for travel with lessons on leadership, service, science and culture -- all with an eye towards responsible global citizenship. This nationally recognized program content, developed in partnership with experts and input from such organizations as the Peace Corps, the Jane Goodall Institute, the Center for Creative Leadership and the World Wildlife Fund, comes alive through hands-on activities while traveling. A service project in country helps students discover the impact they can have in the world. Science transforms from abstract classroom lesson to concrete experience when the students practice ethnobotany in the Amazon or conservation biology on the plains of Africa. After traveling, the group comes together to coordinate a follow-up leadership project, exercising the skills acquired during travel in service of their own community. These programs have been featured on ABC Nightline, ABC World News Tonight, The Travel Channel and CBS Sunday Morning.

When you join Global Explorers, you join a family. Travel connects people through experience and Global Explorers strives to understand your unique needs, challenges, hopes and aspirations. From the moment you sign up, Global Explorers will help you with everything from fundraising to packing lists and curricular questions to follow-up service, with a goal to make every step of the process as easy, warm and welcoming as possible.
Typing Tutor Software: Free Download

By Beth Dennis, Blind Children’s Consultant, Division for Blind Services

Abstract: This article provides a link to a free typing tutor program.

Key Words: blind, visually impaired, disability, typing, independent living skills

Nowadays, the ability to type by touch is a basic independent living skill. This typing tutor can be downloaded for free and teaches you how to touch type. It has an accessible version for users who are visually impaired or blind. The accessible version uses the text-to-speech engine, Flite, in providing continuous voice support: <www.typefastertypingtutor.com/accversion.html>.

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

Texas Fellows

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters

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<td>David Carabajal</td>
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<td>Bonnie Rudel</td>
<td>Norma Freimark</td>
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For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow or working as a VI professional contact KC Dignan at <kcd@tsbvi.edu>.
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>.

Some changes are coming to TX SenseAbilities!
In 2010 TX SenseAbilities is going greener, and jumping deeper into the digital age, by directing more readers to our web-based edition found at <www.tsbvi.edu>. In order to conserve Project resources and take it easier on the planet, we would like to quit automatically mailing paper copies to people who don’t want or need them. Soon we will begin collecting a new database of e-mail addresses from our readers, so we can send an e-mail announcement and web link when a new issue is published online. Be on the lookout for a letter from us explaining the details. And never fear: you will still have an option to subscribe if you aren’t able to use our web edition and wish to continue receiving a paper copy of TX SenseAbilities in the mail!

2010 CSUN Conference
The 25th Annual International Technology & Persons with Disabilities Conference
March 22-27, 2010
Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel
San Diego, CA
For information go to www.csunconference.org

TAER 2010
Reaching Beyond Expectations!
March 25-27, 2010
El Tropicano Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX
Keynote Speaker:
Jonathan Mosen, Vice President, Blindness Hardware Product Management
Freedom Scientific BLV Group LLC
For more information check www.txaer.org

Texas Goalball Invitational
Region 10 ESC and Lions International
March 6
Nimitz High School, Irving, Texas
Goalball tournament for advanced players.
Players may enter as a team, or may enter individually and will be placed on a team.
Contact Christy Householter at <christy.householter@region10.org>, or 972-348-1634.
Your Definition of Success: It’s an Inside Job

A Transition Weekend for Parents of Students Who Are Visually Impaired with Additional Disabilities, Including Deafblindness.

April 16-18, 2010
Drury Inn and Suites
Austin, TX

This workshop will address how to take a more active role in Transition Planning to help move learners with visual and multiple impairments or deafblindness toward a personally satisfying adult life in the community.

Transition Planning is based on setting personal goals for a meaningful and productive life, taking steps toward realizing those goals, and making connections with allies who can help. This weekend workshop is designed for families of children who have visual impairments or deafblindness, as well as additional disabilities which limit their independence and create a need for ongoing support, supervision, and assistance as they move into adulthood. Participants will learn effective strategies to make the most of the secondary school years by being prepared to set clear and realistic goals that reflect the students preferences and abilities.

- Find out about the practices that indicate effective transition planning.
- Learn about the principles and methods of person-centered planning and customized employment.
- Meet representatives of agencies and organizations that support adults with visual impairments and deafblindness.
- Be inspired by the personal stories of young adults who are now leading meaningful lives.
- Set a goal, by identifying a personal definition of success for your student.

This weekend-long workshop will include information for parents of students with functioning levels in the range of “functionally academic” to those with “severe and profound developmental delays,” who are interested in learning more about planning for their child’s transition into their adult lives.

Limited travel stipends will be available for parents who would like to attend.

For further information and Registration, check <www.tsbvi.edu>, or contact: Brian Sobeck at 512-206-9225; or email <briansobeck@tsbvi.edu>.
Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired TETN Broadcast
Schedule for Spring 2010

Please contact the Distance Learning Consultant at your local education service center to access these broadcasts. Sorry, but at this time the distance education broadcasts can be viewed in real time only within the state of Texas.

**Braille Music – TETN #35062**
Sharon Nichols, Technology Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

**February 16**
**Time: 1:30-3:30 PM**

Many students with visual impairments enjoy reading and playing music. This broadcast will familiarize music teachers and others with scanning, creating, editing and embossing music Braille. Included is a demonstration of a student using LimeAloud and JAWS to create, edit and emboss music Braille.

Credits: 1 3/4 hours SBEC and ACVREP

**Behavior Considerations for Students with Deafblindness – TETN #35061**
Presenter: David Wiley, Transition Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

**March 11**
**Time: 1:30-3:30 PM**

Students with deafblindness face incredible stresses in their school and community settings that often result in behavioral challenges. This TETN will focus on some of the issues and strategies for addressing behavioral concerns for these students.

Credits: 1 3/4 hours SBEC and ACVREP

**New Teacher Series: Role of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments with Low Vision Students – TETN #35073**
Chrissy Cowan, Mentor Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach

**April 8**
**Time: 1:30-4:00 PM**

The final of our 3-part series for new teachers takes a look at the support needed by a low vision student from his/her teacher of the visually impaired. Chrissy will discuss the TVI’s role in assessment, IEP development, service delivery models, and instruction for these students.

Credits: 2 1/4 hours SBEC and ACVREP

**The Importance of Early Identification of Deafblindness in Babies – TETN #35064**
Kate Hurst, Statewide Staff Development Coordinator, and Gigi Newton, Early Childhood Consultant, TSBVI Outreach

**April 21**
**Time: 1:30-3:30 PM**

This broadcast will discuss why early identification of vision and hearing loss is so critical and makes a case for improving our early support to these children and their families.

Credits: 1 3/4 hours SBEC and ACVREP

For more information contact Kate Hurst at 512-206-9224 or <katehurst@tsbvi.edu>; or you can check the TSBVI website at: <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/de.htm>
2010 Texas Focus: Learning from Near to Far
Dallas/Plano Marriott at Legacy Town Center, 7120 Dallas Parkway, Plano, TX

Pre-Conference for Parents & New Teachers:
June 9, (Wednesday)
New Teacher Pre-Conference Speaker:
Tanni Anthony, COMS/TVI, Senior Consultant, Colorado Deafblind Services, Denver, CO

Conference: June 10-11, 2010 (Th – F)
General Session Speakers:
Michael McLinden, Co-Author of Learning Through Touch, University of Birmingham School of Education, Birmingham, UK
Dr. David Birch, Chief Scientific & Executive Officer Director, Rose-Silverthorne Retinal Degenerations Laboratory, Retina Foundation of the Southwest, Dallas, TX

Look for more information at:
http://www.tsbvi.edu/news.htm#focus

A Multidisciplinary Low Vision Rehabilitation And Research Conference

Envision invites you to attend the fifth annual Envision Conference
September 22-25, 2009
Westin Riverwalk Hotel, San Antonio, TX.

Envision Conference 2010 features four tracks of continuing education, workshops, and research and poster presentations. The adjacent exhibit hall features vendors from all over the country displaying the latest in technology and services in low vision rehabilitation as well as book publishers and optometric suppliers.

You may register quickly and conveniently online, or, you can download the registration form from the site and mail it to Envision. The instructions are on the conference website:
www.envisionconference.org.

TSBVI Short-term Programs for Academic Students
Spring 2010

March 25–28** “Traveling with Low Vision” Weekend (grades 9-12)
April 8–11** High School Independence Weekend #2: Prom (grades 10-12)
April 15–18** Low Vision Tools & Strategies: Elementary
May 6–9** Elementary School Independence Weekend #2 (ages 6-8)
May 13–16** Junior Independence Weekend (grades 6-8)

** – Weekend Program—students miss only one day of school.

“Access” = needed by visually impaired students in order to access the core curriculum. Goals for Access to Academics classes are individualized by request, and could include areas such as technology; tactile graphics; math or science tools; braille literacy; ILS; and other areas from the Expanded Core Curriculum. For Access classes with a “Special Focus,” students may work in that area or choose any other area of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

More information is available at: <www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/short-classes.htm>.

If you know a student who may benefit from any of these programs, or if you would like to share or receive additional information, please contact:
Dr. Lauren Newton, Principal of Special Programs
Phone: (512) 206-9119 • FAX: (512) 206-9168 • email: laurennewton@tsbvi.edu
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TSBVI Outreach
1100 West 45th Street
Austin, Texas 78756

Production Staff
Editor-in-Chief
David Wiley (512) 206-9219
<davidwiley@tsbvi.edu>

Editor’s Assistant
Beth Bible (512) 206-9103
<bethbible@tsbvi.edu>

DARS-DBS Editor
Beth Dennis (512) 377-0578
<Beth.Dennis@dars.state.tx.us>

Website Editor
Jim Allan (512) 206-9315
<jimallan@tsbvi.edu>

Spanish Edition Editor
Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418
<jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>

Braille Transcriber
B.J. Cepeda (512) 377-0665
<Bj.cepeda@dars.state.tx.us>

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

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

Section Editors
Family Editor
Edgenie Bellah (512) 206-9423
<edgeniebellah@tsbvi.edu>
Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418
<jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu>

Programming Editors
Stacy Shafer (512) 206-9140
<stacyjshafer@tsbvi.edu>
Holly Cooper (512) 206-9217
<hollycooper@tsbvi.edu>

News and Views
Beth Dennis (512) 377-0578
<Beth.Dennis@dars.state.tx.us>

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