

# TX SenseAbilities

A Bi-Annual Publication About Visual Impairments and Deafblindness for Families and Professionals

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Keywords: Family Wisdom, visual impairments, eye exam, self-determination, medical

## **A little bit about the author:**

Megan is a 3rd grader. She lives with her mom, Amber and younger brother, Jacob. Her dad, Trae, her step-mom, Brandee, half brother, Gabe live nearby. Megan was diagnosed with nystagmus when she was 2 months old and Septo-optic Dysplasia a few years later. Even with her vision disability, Megan stays positive and open to speaking about her vision. She speaks to her class each year about her vision needs, and accommodations. She is involved in TaeKwonDo, Champions Baseball, and Superkids at her home church. Megan enjoys reading and writing more than anything. Her life goal is to be a published author and own a library.

## **Megan Rose Elliott:**

Sometimes you have to go to the eye doctor. It may sound scary, but it is actually a lot of fun!

First, you need to get to the eye doctor by car, truck, or bus. Sometimes you get to ride in the elevator. Be sure to act silly in front of the mirrors in the elevator. When you get off the elevator or get to the doctors office, go to the desk to tell them your name, birthday, and why you are there. Next, your mommy or daddy will get a buzzer that buzzes when it is your turn to go to the doctor. While in the waiting area, you can play in the waiting area. Sometimes there are movies, play tables, and



An eight-year-old talented young lady with a visual impairment shares with others what it is like to go for an eye exam.

books. When the buzzer goes off, it's your turn to go!

When you get to the room, you get to sit in a big chair. The chair has buttons and really cool eye stuff but don't touch it. Those are for the doctor. The nurse comes in first to talk with you and your mommy or daddy.

Sometimes the nurse will put drops in your eyes. They hurt but the drops make your pupil bigger. The pupil is the black

part of your eye. The drops have to set in your eyes, so you have to wait awhile. You get to go to a different waiting room, it is a lot darker because the light can hurt your eyes.

The nurse will come back to get you when the doctor and your eyes are ready. The doctor will make you read letters on a TV that is on the other side of the room. The letters get smaller and smaller but try your best. Sometimes he puts silly glasses on you with different things in them. You will usually have to read the TV letters again. He will also shine a light in your eyes. Be sure to be still, listen to his instructions and answer all the questions he asks... do not be silly! The doctor will talk to your mommy or daddy about what he sees and what he wants to do. Sometimes you get told you will get new glasses! When you leave be sure to get the cool sunglasses to protect your eyes from the outside light.

The eye doctor is a really cool place to go.

Keywords: family wisdom, sibling, deafblindness, disability community, anthropology

There's an old saying among anthropologists that you have to spend time in another culture before you can truly understand your own. The unspoken footnote to this bit of wisdom is that you won't understand either place until you come home.

The foreign makes the familiar intelligible in new and previously impossible ways.

I first experienced the feeling of "coming home" to disability as an undergraduate researcher in Ghana. Pushed by my parents and encouraged by a family friend who was an international deafblindness expert, I had been careful to set everything up in advance for my short-term project on blindness and social stigma. Our friend's stories of working with families and educators on deafblindness issues in Asia and Africa dazzled me, and I was curious about following in her path, even for only a short period. It would be the first of many research experiences with disability after growing up with a younger sister, Katie, who has CHARGE syndrome and deafblindness.

On the first day of my project, I hopped a taxi from my temporary home at a local hostel to the office of the Ghanaian Association of the Blind. It was rush hour and Accra's streets were packed. People selling gum, cigarettes, and compact discs wove



Through the lens of anthropology, the author shares her journey toward embracing being part of the disability community as both sibling and professional.

their way between stalled traffic at lights, along with children and adults begging for money. I noticed adults with physical disabilities crawling on the sidewalks, flip flop sandals positioned carefully on their hands and feet to protect them from the rough ground. I had been told of this and had even seen pictures, but the image still shocked me.

I arrived at the Association of the Blind and tried to make my way through the complex in search of the appropriate office. As a 21-year-old white American woman, I stood out. People were curious. Two men in their twenties approached me. They were not verbal, so they began signing to me. Although I did not understand most of what they said, we all grinned widely as we tried to communicate across the layers of barriers. They led me around the facility to the office where I was to meet an internationally respected disability expert, and we said our goodbyes. I recall a feeling of utter naturalness and comfort. It hit me: I was in the right place, in every sense.

This was the first time I truly felt the universality of my position as a person who grew up in the disability community. Until then and, indeed, for many years after, my feelings about disability in my academic and professional life were marked by ambivalence. While part of me perhaps always knew I would end up dedicating my career to disability issues, I was reticent – scared, even –

about committing. Was I really ready to welcome disability into my work life, since it would always be a fixture of my personal world? And, if I didn't want to be a special education teacher or service provider, what could I possibly do?

I had been immersed in disability worlds since the age of four, when my sister was born. Although we



did not receive a proper diagnosis for many years, Katie had CHARGE syndrome, a rare genetic condition found in about one in 10,000 births. I grew up surrounded by children with disabilities and their families. I visited the local parent resource center with my mom, helped my parents flip through binders of special education law during our struggles to obtain appropriate school services, and I accompanied my parents on countless visits to doctors, specialists, and therapists.

As a stereotypical older sibling, it was my job

to help and I took pride in it. Still, as is typical, I became less involved as I got older. I was busy with high school stuff – classes, extracurriculars, and friends – and then I went away to university. My love for Katie was unwavering, yet I noticed a growing public-private divide in my relationship with disability. It had become something that was confined to my family life, but my academic and personal realms were increasingly separate. Or were they? Although I felt that way at the time, looking back I can see clearly that I flirted with disability issues as a vocation throughout college. I simply wasn't ready to commit, nor did I know where I fit in.

During my semester in Ghana, I was shocked by the genuine interest – curiosity, even! – that my peers and professors showed for my research. It had never dawned on me that people who were not personally connected to disability might care. As a sociology and anthropology major, I had no idea that disability was even a viable area of study. I did not know of any scholars in traditional academic areas who focused on disability, nor had I read or even heard of any books or articles on the topic. While gender, sexuality, and race were fair game in terms of identity politics, disability somehow remained in the shadows. Even if I'd been ready to pursue an academic career researching disability, I did not yet know it was an option. I had no models.

In the years that followed, I largely forgot about disability outside of my family life. I worked abroad briefly after graduation and then returned to the U.S., where I embarked on the typical life of many in my peer group. I lived in a large city filled with countless restaurants and bars, worked diverse jobs of various interest levels, hung out with my friends, and met the incredible man I would later

marry. For the first time in my life, I eschewed all things serious. I didn't even do volunteer work! And I was totally and utterly bored.

Young and relatively mobile, I took my meager savings and moved to South America in search of more. After a position as a preschool English teacher in Ecuador ended, I wandered down to Bolivia in search of volunteer work and adventure. I began helping out at a residential center for children with disabilities – many of whom had been abandoned – and also orphans. When I first toured the facility, I once again encountered that unmistakable sense of knowing. Disability was home.

The experience opened my eyes in new ways to disability realities I had not encountered. I saw multiple children whose disabilities – physical and intellectual – were inseparable from abuse in their former homes. Most of the kids never learned basic living skills, much less anything academic. Well-meaning and overworked staff, many of whom were just teenagers themselves, tied children to wheelchairs to keep them in place.

I will never forget the day that my now husband, who was with me, realized that his favorite student could walk with assistance and did not need to stay in her wheelchair. Little Magdalena, who was known for giving wet, sloppy kisses on the cheek, spent her mornings over the weeks that followed dancing with my husband. She loved him. We marveled at her secret abilities and wondered what else she might have been able to do with adaptive technologies, educational funding, and family and community support.

I came back to the U.S. with a new sense of direction. I began an interdisciplinary Master's

degree program and promptly fell in love with a class on the anthropology of disability. I had not known the topic even existed! I finally encountered disability studies literature, as well as social science and humanities works on disability. I was hooked.

Coming home I read everything I could find, wrote a thesis about parent advocacy efforts, and set out to find my dream job in disability. Unfortunately, it remained elusive and I wandered elsewhere, dedicating myself largely to issues of education, migration, and human rights. As always, I was drawn in by the individual faces and stories behind broader lived experiences, yet I had little interest in working my way up a nonprofit ladder. I wanted to stay in the thick of it, to immerse myself in life histories and absorb everything people would reveal. After years of fighting it, I gave in: it was time to get a PhD in cultural anthropology.

Five years later, I can finally say that my old ambivalence is gone. I have immersed myself in the formal study of disability and am pleasantly surprised by the support I have received from the academic community and beyond. I spend my days researching, reading, writing, and talking about disability issues, and I am lucky to be involved with some fantastic local organizations. I have conducted research in Central America and the U.S., presented papers at multiple conferences, and I am in the process of writing a dissertation on family experiences with complex or unidentified diagnoses. It has been a long road, but it all circles back to Katie.

Every aspect of my work is informed by my own experiences as a sibling, and I am honored and humbled by families' willingness to grant me a small window into their stories. I feel so lucky to be part of a nascent but growing group of social science

and humanities scholars working in the area of disability. I am also steadfast in my commitment to generating scholarship that reaches beyond the walls of academia. I hope that my work will be read by families, organizations, professionals, and policy makers. As a sibling-researcher, these are not abstract aims. I literally think about them every morning as I sit down to write or each time I meet with other families. These goals animate every step I take.

I still do not know how I fit into the dominant perceptions of what it means to be a sibling of someone with disabilities. My parents were warned when Katie and I were young that I would likely be jealous or resentful of her, since she would receive so much attention because of her disabilities. This always struck me as ridiculous, even as a child. Did experts really think that I was selfish enough to resent my parents' attempts to find new therapies or educational techniques? Although other siblings have criticized my outspokenness on this issue, I remain adamant. Do I think siblings should be allowed to feel jealous, anxious, or confused? Of course! All siblings have the right to these feelings, regardless of whether disability is in the picture. As the sister of someone with disabilities, however, I have never appreciated the assumption that my sibling relationship was fundamentally marred by resentment and jealousy. Because, for me, it was never the case.

Another concern was that I might develop so-called problem behaviors and act out in response to our family's struggles. In reality, I never felt like that was an option. My family had our hands full and simply didn't have room for me to do poorly in school or get into trouble. As an adult, I am not convinced that this pressure was a bad thing. Did I miss out by pushing myself to make good grades

and not get caught up in boys, partying, or risky behaviors as a teenager?

The discourse on siblings still hinges on a curious paradox: whether we are too good or too bad, we will still be pathologized. Our behaviors are all too often explained in terms of our sibling status. This is an extremely problematic gap in understandings of who we really are as a diverse group of individuals with different goals, anxieties, and hopes, who happen to be unified by our sibling status. Can I explain many aspects of my personality in terms of my experiences with Katie? Yes, but that doesn't make those explanations correct, nor does it reveal anything about how I might have turned out in a different family context.

Even today, I struggle to express my childhood feelings about Katie's disabilities for one simple reason: Katie was normal to me. I knew nothing else and, even in the earliest weeks of Katie's life, when we did not know if she would survive nor did we understand the complexity of her intellectual and sensory disabilities, I was fiercely proud of her. She was my sister. She was the only sister I had, the only sibling relationship I would ever know.

As I prepared to enter high school, my family became involved in a heated dispute over Katie's educational rights. I do not recall speaking to any of my friends about it until my final year of school, but that silence was part of a broader social protocol. My peers and I restricted our conversations largely to things like boys, clothes, and gossip. I later learned that some of my friends had faced serious family struggles during that time – addiction, mental illness, infidelity, domestic violence – yet we didn't discuss these experiences until many years later. Perhaps disability had less to do with my silence that I used to think.

Even at the peak of my family's legal battle to meet Katie's educational needs, the only profound feelings of sadness and anger I had were never directed at Katie, but always toward the failure of the institutions we relied upon to meet our needs. The key is that these needs were all of ours. I learned early that the perfect family's depicted on television are nothing but fiction, and in reality we all have our struggles. I realized, too, that we live in a world in which people are literally cast aside. This was probably the hardest thing to process as a teenager, and I recall a palpable sense of grief for the naïve optimism I saw in many of my peers.

Looking back, the biggest emotional struggle for me as a teenager was my lack of a network of other siblings to relate to. Not only did I have no one to talk to who could truly relate to my experiences, but I had no models. This was before the days of Facebook and disability listservs, and I would not learn of Sibshops until years later. The only sibling support groups in our area were for brothers and sisters of kids with autism, so that didn't work. Without anyone to follow, I simply did the best that

I could. I winged it. Once I began college, I made an explicit effort to open up about my experiences with Katie from the start. I learned very quickly that people were genuinely interested in hearing our story, and my previous silence lifted.

Looking back at my circuitous path, I should have known that I was a researcher at heart. My passions are meeting families, hearing stories, writing what I see, and sharing these powerful disability realities with people who might not encounter them otherwise. My aim is, and perhaps has always been, to get the word out. I want to learn, witness, and disseminate.

I want to be part of a small, but growing, effort to push disability from society's margins and into mainstream discussions. I want to do everything I can to make sure that other siblings do not feel as isolated or singular as I did when I was younger, and to encourage scholars and journalists to take disability seriously – not as an object of pity or a source of stigma, but as a very real aspect of the human experience that will touch each of us in some way.



I want to tell Katie's story, to use my own family's experiences and those of others like us, to effect change and make people listen. It took me until now, as a married mother in my thirties, to really embrace this as my professional destiny, but I think I can finally say that my old ambivalence is gone. Let's do this.

# THE STATEWIDE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Molly Roberts, Family Leader and Texas Chargers Treasurer, Denton, TX

Keywords: Family Wisdom, deafblindness, deaf, hard of hearing, learning, communication

A parent shares her experience attending the Texas Statewide Conference on Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing with her son.

My son Christian and I had the opportunity to attend the Texas Statewide Conference on Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SWCED) this July in San Antonio and BOY am I glad we did! It was an exceptional conference, full of breakout sessions for professionals and parents, including sessions on navigating the IEP process, teaming with professionals and advocating for your child. Not only was this a week for acquiring valuable knowledge, it was an opportunity for creating special memories between Christian and me.

Christian has CHARGE Syndrome and is dual sensory impaired. He attends a Regional Day School for the Deaf Program close to home. For years I would hear his educational team talk about attending SWCED, but I had not considered it for parents. At the last minute I decided to read more about it and found out that not only did they have multiple sessions geared for parents, the registration rate for families was extremely low plus they provided childcare. I decided this would be a special bonding opportunity for Christian and me. We packed our bags and headed down to San Antonio. Little did I know we were in for a huge surprise!

When we arrived I decided to look at the sessions and I noticed that David Brown, the CHARGE

Syndrome "guru", was going to be speaking. I was like a kid on Christmas Eve! Somehow I had managed to luck out and wind up with the opportunity to visit with David Brown one on one!! Not only that, he offered to sit down to

lunch with me, Christian and his educational team. It was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity that I will never forget.

No matter how many times I listen to David Brown talk about the sensory system I learn something new. I leave his lectures amazed at the resilience of individuals with multiple sensory impairments. Their behaviors are not maladaptive; they are adaptive, as they are seeking sensory input. As professionals and parents our role is not to remove the behavior, but rather replace it, if possible, with a more appropriate sensory solution.

Principal at New Mexico's School for the Deaf, Dr. Ron Stern and his wife, Hedy Udkovich Stern, spoke about guiding principles for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children. They themselves are both deaf and have children and a grandchild who are deaf. They encouraged parents to communicate fluently with their children and ensure they are active participants in their homes and community. Their lecture was truly motivating and inspired me to find new ways to include Christian in family discussions and community outings.

Christian had an amazing time as well. The Texas School for the Deaf did an excellent job



orchestrating childcare. The volunteers were able to communicate with Christian and they included him in all the activities. During the times we were not busy at conference, Christian and I made many special memories. We visited the San Antonio Zoo and Morgan's Wonderland, saw family, checked out the Alamo and ate many yummy meals followed by tasty treats. We also

ventured down to the River Walk for dinner with David Brown and other friends from the Texas Charge community. It was such a special week and undoubtedly, one I will never forget. I intend to make SWCED a yearly experience for Christian and me and I highly recommend other families take advantage of this exceptional resource.

## ENCHANTED ROCK ADVENTURE

Diego and his mom, Veronica Alvarez, Round Rock, TX

Keywords: family wisdom, family education, albinism, visual impairment, inclusion

**Editor's note:** TAPVI (Texas Association for the Parents of Children with Visual Impairments) is a non-profit organization of parents and professionals committed to providing support to families of children who have blindness or visual impairments including those with additional disabilities. The board has been organizing Family Fun Days across Texas. These events provide opportunities to develop recreation and social skills, components of the expanded core curriculum. Become a member of TAPVI and your family can be part of the fun. Information about joining this organization can be found at [www.tapvi.com](http://www.tapvi.com).

The next writing is from my ten-year-old son, Diego. He was born at 24 weeks and developed ROP Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) and is legally blind. He is learning to read and write in braille and uses a braille notetaker. It is amazing to see his little



A proud mom shares her son's story about his rock climbing experience.

fingers go so fast over the keys of the BrailleNote. It's been a long journey to accomplish this step in his academic skills and we are so proud of him. We took a trip to Enchanted Rock Park with TAPVI and he wrote about his experience for school homework.

**In Diego's words:** On a beautiful Sunday my family and I went to an Enchanted

Rock adventure! First on Saturday we traveled to Fredericksburg, Texas in our car. I was with my family and other families with VI kids. Then we went to have dinner at a pizza place.

The next day we arrived at the Enchanted Rock Park. We climbed the steps up the mountain. We took breaks because we were tired. We hiked to the top of the mountain. When we got to the top I felt the wind. The rock is made of granite. I saw the valley of trees. I heard the wind blow. We took pictures too. It was a fun day for me for the first time to hike on a mountain. I recommend to all the people to go and explore the Enchanted Rock Park.

# TRAVELS TO SAN DIEGO: A FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE AT THE NOAH CONFERENCE

Andrea Wade, Parent

My name is Andrea Wade and my husband, Sean, and I have a 5-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who has albinism. Albinism is an inherited condition in which people have little or no pigment in their skin, hair and/or eyes. They have inherited genes that do not make the usual amount of a pigment called melanin. About one in 17,000 people in the U.S. have some type of albinism.

Although Elizabeth was born with a headful of white hair, we didn't learn that she had albinism until she was about six weeks old. We understood that we needed to take necessary precautions to protect her while she was out in the sun by wearing sunscreen, sunglasses and protective clothing. One issue that we were completely unaware of is that people with albinism always have a visual impairment and it is not something that is correctable with glasses. The degree of visual impairment varies, but many people with albinism are considered legally blind. At our most recent visit to the eye doctor, Elizabeth's corrected vision was 20/200.

Since learning that Elizabeth has albinism, we became members of a wonderful organization called NOAH (National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation). NOAH hosts a national conference every other summer and this past July



A parent describes the benefits of her family attending a national conference that is specific to her child's eye condition. The wide variety of session topics offered strategies to use at school, home and in the community so that her child will be included in activities.

was our second time attending the conference. The conference this year was in San Diego and we decided our 3-year-old son, Joseph, who does not have albinism, would now be old enough to enjoy the trip as well. The NOAH conference consists of a variety of workshops for parents of children with albinism and adults with albinism, as well as a number of planned social activities. They also have a great kid's program that has activities for kids from toddlers to teenagers. Both Elizabeth and Joseph got to play and spend time with other children their age. Although we had been to the conference two years ago, we are at a different stage in our learning and knew there

would be new topics and discussions to enjoy. I also noticed our interests in certain topics had changed since the last conference.

My husband was interested in technology at the conference two years ago. This conference he attended more of the social specific sessions. He went to Dealing with the Negative Comments, Building Self-Esteem in your Child, and the Joys and Challenges of Parenting. I found myself more interested in the sessions covering education. I enjoyed Practical Applications to Success for Students with Albinism, Know O&M, and Visual Access in Today's Schools.

One session that particularly impressed me was No O&M? Know O&M! It is easy to take this for granted but O&M (Orientation and Mobility) training really helps a person learn to orient him or herself and navigate the surroundings. The skills taught are ones that can be applied to any environment. The presenter also pointed out the importance of utilizing what you have in the environment such as landmarks, maps, and asking for assistance. I realized this just the other day as we were driving our kids to go bowling. Elizabeth said, "We are getting close to the bowling alley because I can see that yellow sign." This was the first time I had heard her say this and I realized she picks up on more than I realize. She may not be able to read the sign, but she knows when she sees that yellow sign, we are close to our destination. One other excellent point from the session was that O&M really needs to be done in an environment the person is unfamiliar with—if they already know how to get around their home, it won't look like they have any skills that need to be worked on.

A new session offered at this conference that my husband and I both attended was 1Touch. It is a self-defense program that was developed to specifically address the needs of those who are blind or visually impaired. The session was interactive with the instructors and we learned the appropriate response and various techniques to protect yourself.

I was also able to attend a workshop specifically for mothers of children with albinism. It is amazing how good you can feel being in the same room as other parents who share similar experiences. There were some friends from the last conference and there were new faces as well. For me, the mother's workshop is a great way to explore your feelings in a safe environment. I love hearing how other mothers have overcome certain challenges and the various successes they have had. We laughed, we cried, and we enjoyed getting to know one another and sharing our stories.

When we first joined NOAH, we knew attending this conference would be a valuable experience for our family. Over 800 people traveled from all over the country and the world to attend this conference. In addition to the sessions, some of the best parts of attending were the casual conversations while at breakfast or lunch, as well as the party on Saturday evening where there is dessert and a DJ! It is so much fun to watch the kids dance and enjoy themselves.

When Elizabeth was born five years ago, we had no idea what adventure we were about to embark on, but we are on the path we were meant to be on and it has been an amazing journey so far... and we look forward to what is yet to come!

# UEB IS COMING TO TEXAS! (WHAT IS IT AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?)

Cyral Miller, Director of Outreach, TSBVI

Key Words: Effective Practices, blind, Braille, literacy, reading, UEB

Reading and writing literary braille in English is undergoing an important change. What's coming is a modified braille system known as the Unified English Braille Code, or the UEB. The UEB is based on the English Braille American Edition so current braille readers will not have to relearn how to read; there are differences in some contractions and new formatting and punctuation rules as well as some new symbols. Think of it as a system upgrade rather than a brand new code. The United States is a relative newcomer to this code. Even though it was first discussed in 1991 by the Braille Authority of North America ( [External link](#) ), UEB was subsequently adopted by most English speaking countries that are part of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB) but not until 2012 did BANA vote to adopt UEB for literary braille - a vote that included maintaining the use of Nemeth code for mathematics and science notation . Since that historic vote, there have been national and state implementation groups actively designing timelines for changes to be phased in by braille producers, test developers and producers, transcribers, teacher preparation programs in their curricula, staff development training materials and other systems involved in braille for reading and writing in English. Information for this article and many resources are available at the BANA website: <http://www.brailleauthority.org> (External link).

The Unified English Braille Code (UEB) creates updates to literary Braille in English. Braille readers and teachers need to become familiar with the changes that have been recently adopted.

## ***Why change the code?***

In addition to the “complexity and disarray” involved in navigating between multiple codes that Drs Cranmer and Abraham Nemeth cited in their call for unifying English braille codes in 1991 , the growing use of computers since

that initial discussion have led to both increased capacity to access braille, new kinds of computer-related terminology to convey, and greater need for easy print-to-braille software systems. There have been multiple adaptations to braille rules needed to accommodate the increasing requirement to express new kinds of information and print formats all while using the same 6 dots. Over the years, different English-speaking countries had evolved their own specialized rules and transcription formats. This limited access across nations even when the language was the same and the internet has broken down many geographical boundaries. The use of computer terms such as URLs had not been foreseen in the development of literary braille codes.

## ***When does this start?***

Switching all the interlocking systems that are part of producing braille materials is not an overnight process. On the national level, it was determined that a goal will be to have made substantial progress in implementing UEB for general use by January 4, 2016 (Louis Braille's birthday!). The American Printing House for the Blind, a major producer of braille and educational literacy

materials, published its timeline for transition to UEB in July 2014, which states that APH will begin producing new textbooks in UEB in the school year 2015-2016. Other states and other producers have been developing their own plans. Texas held a statewide stakeholder group meeting in November 2014 and will publicize state-related timelines by early in 2015. On their website, BANA states that it “recognizes that the implementation of UEB will require major adjustments to the infrastructures that produce, deliver, and teach braille, as well as time and strategies for braille users to become familiar with changes in the code. BANA continues to work with leaders throughout the field to build a carefully designed timeline and coordinated plan. Detailed timelines are under development by individual organizations, and transition efforts are now being initiated.”

It's important to remember that even while UEB is being phased in, many existing published materials are going to be in active use for many years that are not in UEB. There will clearly be a transition phase where different braille codes will be in use at the same time. The timelines that are being developed in each state are meant to ensure the smoothest possible transition, and that students and prospective VI professionals in training will be tested in the codes in which they have been taught.

***What are the main differences between UEB and the code we are currently using in the US—the EBAE?***

A comprehensive document that outlines the changes in the code is available at: [http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/overview\\_changes\\_ebae\\_ueb.html](http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/overview_changes_ebae_ueb.html)

The most obvious changes are dropping 9 contractions: by, into, to, ble, com, dd, ation, ally and o'clock. The ‘snugglers’: A, and, for, of, the, and with will now be spaced separately. In general, the UEB is built on the logic that a symbol must stay the same in all contexts, so there are changes in punctuation and formatting in order to eliminate for example, that a period at the end of a sentence is noted with dots 256 but then that same set of dots is a dd symbol when found in the middle of a word. In print, the use of different visual and graphic organizers has become increasingly important for understanding the information on a page (or online). There are therefore other changes with UEB that are designed to provide information about the print formats to the braille reader. For example, there are unchanging symbols for backslash, bullet, and tilde, dagger, open and closed brackets, and new ways to indicate that a whole selection is in italics or bold or underlines. Web and email addresses can be written in UEB, with no switch over to computer code. These are just a few sample changes.

***What kind of training will be available in UEB, who will teach it and what reference materials will be produced?***

As noted above, at both the national level and the state level, there are groups seeking to develop training materials. There are already a number of useful training tools developed by other countries that switched to UEB before the US. Several of these are listed at the BANA website:

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind Transcriber's UEB Course: <http://www.cnib.ca/en/living/braille/Pages/Transcribers-UEB-Course.aspx>

New Zealand UEB Manual; [http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/NZ UEB Manual 2011.pdf](http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/NZ_UEB_Manual_2011.pdf)

Unified English Braille: Australian Training Manual 2013:<http://brailleaustralia.org/unified-english-braille/unified-english-braille-australian-training-manual-2013/>

UEB Online, a new course from the Royal Institutue for Deaf and Blind Children Renwick Center in Sydney, Australia, designed for sighted readers: <http://uebonline.org>

Hadley School for the Blind has a course starting January 2015 called Transitioning to Unified English Braille: <http://www.hadley.edu/UEBTransition.asp>

In Texas, the TSBVI has begun producing webinars with introductions to UEB and there are plans for offering online study groups for teachers as well as instruction for braille producers in the near future. Look for the archived webinars at the On-the-Go section of the TSBVI <http://www.tsbvi.edu> ( External link ). The Education Service Centers will be offering training at the regional level as well.

***Will UEB be available through refreshable braille displays? How will they be updated?***

All braille translation software, such as Duxbury and Braille 2000 allow both UEB and English Braille American Edition (EBAE) braille for translation embossing. If a student uses a refreshable braille display, such as the Focus Blue, Braille Edge 40 and Brailiant with any screen reading program (including JAWS and VoiceOver) they can easily switch between UEB and EBAE. Notetakers such as BrailleNote, BrailleSense and Pacmates

with refreshable braille displays also can switch between codes. The Mountbatten and other electronic braillewriters have support for entry and output in UEB.

***Can I try UEB to see what it is like?***

Of course! Go to the BANA website and look for the section with example documents in UEB: <http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html>

**Documents:**

- The Gettysburg Address and simbraille
- Dallas, November 22, 1963—Available from BARD for eligible patrons <https://nlsbard.loc.gov>
- Pumpkin Pie Recipe and simbraille
- I Have A Dream and simbraille
- The Wizard of Oz, chapter 1 and simbraille
- Papa John's Online Menu and simbraille
- 20 Google Search Shortcuts and simbraille
- How to Carve Chicken and Turkey simbraille and print
- BANA August Press Release, simbraille and print
- Portion Distortion Quiz, simbraille and print

***I have questions! Where do I turn?***

At this time, the very best source for a wide variety of resources on the UEB is the BANA website. BANA committees are developing new materials and keeping the site current. Each state will have a UEB implementation plan. The Texas plan will be posted widely on the ESC 11 Statewide Leadership for Blind and Visually Impaired Services Network webpages, on the TSBVI website, and other ESC VI related sites.

# INTERVENER BASICS: MYTH, LEGEND, AND REALITY

David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Project, Austin, TX

Key Words: Effective Practices, deafblind, intervener, misconceptions, access

Over the last decade, trained interveners have become a more familiar model used in schools and communities across the U.S. to provide individual support to people with deafblindness. Though many people are now familiar with the word or job title, the practices surrounding use of an intervener in school settings may continue to be misunderstood. Some misunderstandings are understandable, as the use of the intervener model has some complexities, and there are many gray areas in the practice based on meeting the individual needs of students who are deafblind and the circumstances of the settings where they learn. Additionally, through the years efforts to simplify complex issues have resulted in a perception of “rules” about the use of interveners that don’t fully capture the depth of the issues involved.

For the purpose of this paper, let’s call these misunderstandings and over-simplifications “intervener myths.” By myths I mean to say, there are things I have heard people express about what interveners can or should do that do not tell the whole story, or fail to account for individual differences. Clarifying some of these issues might dispel some of these myths.

## WHAT IS AN INTERVENER, AND HOW ARE THEY USED IN SCHOOLS?

There are some misconceptions associated with using interveners to provide support to students with deafblindness in educational settings. The author attempts to clarify intervener myths with the realities of the intervener model.

Before getting to the myths, it might be best to start with the current ideas agreement what an intervener is. There is an initiative spearheaded by the National Center on Deafblindness (NCDB) to gather feedback and arrive at a shared understanding of intervener issues.

A definition of intervener developed through this initiative states:

Interveners, through the provision of intervener services, provide access to information and communication and facilitate the development of social and emotional well-being for children who are deaf-blind. In educational environments, intervener services are provided by an individual, typically a paraeducator, who has received specialized training in deaf-blindness and the process of intervention. An intervener provides consistent one –to-one support to a student who is deaf-blind (age 3 through 21) throughout the instructional day.

...an intervener’s primary roles are to (Alsop, Blaha, & Kloos, 2000, <https://nationaldb.org/library/page/2266>):

- provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information that is usually gained by typical students through vision and hearing, but that is unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deaf-blind;
- provide access to and/or assist in the devel-

opment and use of receptive and expressive communication skills;

- facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being; and,
- provide support to help a student form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities.

A definition like this goes a long way toward providing guidance to educational teams and community service providers utilizing the intervener model of support for people with deafblindness. However, some misconceptions or “myths” remain to be discussed.

## INTERVENER MYTHS DISPELLED

### **Myth # 1:**

An intervener is a 1-on-1 support to provide more help for the person, or an “extra set of hands”.

### **Reality:**

An intervener is a related service that provides a person with deafblindness with access to information, interaction, and instruction he or she would otherwise miss due to sensory issues.

Any student in any school could benefit in various ways from a personal assistant. An intervener is more than a personal assistant. The intervener is essential for many students with deafblindness to gain basic access to and benefit from instruction and interaction. Explaining the need for a trained intervener should focus clearly on issues related to deafblindness: access to information, communication support, and promotion of trusting relationships.

The discussion questions found at the end of this article can illustrate these issues.

### **Myth # 2:**

Every student who is deafblind needs an intervener throughout the school day.

### **Reality:**

Every student who is deafblind must have consistent access to information, environments, communication, and instruction, in all instructional environments throughout the school day.

An intervener is one way to achieve this, but not always the only way to achieve this goal. There are several potential ways to insure access for a student with deafblindness:

- Environmental adaptations such as preferential seating, enhanced lighting, or noise control.
- Adaptive technologies.
- Low staff : student ratios to ensure individual attention.
- Communication rich environment.
- Assign an intervener with deafblindness-related training.
- Combination or all of the above.

The intervener is not intended to replace the other ways a student may gain access. The intervener model is needed when other solutions fail to ensure access to information, result in communication breakdowns, or create stress associated with lack of emotional support. The circumstances surrounding certain activities or settings during the day may make other solutions sufficient for full access in some situations, and an intervener necessary in others.



**Myth # 3:**

Interveners shouldn't work with other students, and shouldn't have to do work not directly related to their student who is deafblind, such as playground or cafeteria monitoring, because that is not their job.

**Reality:**

Access for the student who is deafblind is the intervener's number one priority. The intervener should not be asked to do something else if it interferes with this priority.

To effectively support a student with deafblindness, these intervener responsibilities should take priority over other duties:

- providing access to the student who is deafblind by supplying information, supporting communication, and promoting emotional wellbeing;
- meeting with team members to discuss issues and strategies related to the student;
- meeting with teachers to become familiar with upcoming lessons in order to plan needed adaptations or modifications;
- making or adapting learning materials for the student to use during lessons.

However, if the student is absent, receiving intervention from another person who is providing information and communication access, or engaged in independent work, the intervener may be available help in other areas.

**Myth # 4:**

No more than one person can provide intervention over the course of a day.

**Reality:**

Many students who are deafblind have trouble recognizing, trusting, and/or bonding with others, and have a need for great consistency in order to understand what is happening. For students that have these concerns, it is important that the intervener is someone they know and trust.

When trust, bonding, and relationship building skills are issues for the student, fewer people serving as intervener is helpful or necessary. But these issues need to be weighed against practical staffing issues, especially when the student has good relationship-building skills.

These issues should be discussed when considering intervener staff assignments.

Reasons it is beneficial to have only one intervener:

- People with deafblindness have trouble trusting and bonding with people they do not recognize or know, leading to stress or anxiety.
- The person who is deafblind may not yet have developed the social ability to deal with multiple people.
- People who are deafblind depend on consistency and routine to help them recognize what is happening and know what to expect.
- People who are deafblind often have unique communication systems and preferences that need to be used consistently.
- Expressive communication for people with deafblindness who are emerging communicators may be subtle and difficult to recognize or understand for people who don't know them very well. This leads to frustration and missed opportunities to interact.

Reasons more than one intervener might be helpful or necessary:

**Some differences in the roles of SSPs and interveners.**

SSPs	INTERVENERS
SSPs work at the direction of the person who is deafblind.	If the person who is deafblind has difficulty organizing, planning, and initiating due to age, maturity, lack of experience, or additional disabilities, the intervener may help provide direction and encouragement so the person has opportunities for meaningful activities based on personal preferences.
SSPs provide the information needed so the person who is deafblind can make decisions.	If the person who is deafblind has difficulty making or communicating decisions due to age, maturity, lack of experience, or additional disabilities, the intervener may help the person make good decisions based on the situation and the person's individual preferences.
SSPs supply information and facilitate communication so the person who is deafblind can use his or her skills effectively.	Interveners help a person who is deafblind use their skills by supplying information and facilitating communication, but also teach the person new skills and knowledge, and new ways to use their skills and knowledge.

- If the person or situation requires long periods of continuous sign language, especially tactile sign, fatigue creates a problem.
- If only one person acts as intervener, there may be problems if the intervener is ill or absent.
- If the person can do well with an additional intervener, it may prevent any problems associated with emotional attachment.

**Myth # 5:**

Interveners don't do personal care activities or work in the home of the person who is deafblind.

**Reality:**

The role of the intervener is to support the person who is deafblind with access to information, communication, and emotional support. Interveners also teach skills to help increase the person's independence. These supports may be needed and

provided in any location or during any life activity that happens to arise. Interveners do with, not for, the person with deafblindness.

**Myth # 6:**

Interveners work with children, particularly at school. Adults with deafblindness don't need interveners, and are supported when needed by Support Service Providers (SSPs).

**Reality:**

SSPs are supports used by adults with deafblindness who have strong skills related to independence and self-direction. Interveners serve a different role than SSPs. The service needed is less related to age and setting as it is to the individual needs, abilities, and independence of the person being supported.

## CONCLUSION

As interveners are utilized more regularly in school and community settings, questions about the practice will continue to be asked, and understanding about the role will be refined. Individual solutions to providing the most appropriate support for people with deafblindness will be discovered. Though these solutions may vary, principles of access, communication, and support should guide the process rather than preconceived notions found in “intervener myths.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discussion of these questions about the student’s needs associated with access to information, communication, and emotional support may help clarify the kind of adaptation and intervention needed for students in a school environment. (Adapted from an unpublished draft of “Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings,” by the Texas Deafblind Project.)

1. Does the student need assistance to effectively detect, gather, and/or prioritize information from communication partners and the surrounding environment?
2. Does the student rely on the sense of touch or near vision to gain information, so that he or she is unable to reliably get information that other students get from a distance?
3. In a group instructional setting, is it difficult for the student to gather information or follow a discussion?
4. Does the student use equipment or adaptive aids, but not efficiently or effectively enough to keep up with the pace of the instruction being given?

5. Is the student unable to orient him/herself to the environment or move to different learning environments without assistance?
6. Does the student rely on communication methods not generally used or understood by many of his or her communication partners (teachers, staff, or peers)? Consider all the various environments the student accesses throughout the entire school day.
7. Does the student often need individual intervention by a trained or knowledgeable support person in order to communicate effectively receptively and/or expressively?
8. Does the student need a high degree of consistency in strategies and communication systems, so that working with numerous people during the day causes him/her confusion and frustration?
9. Due to sensory isolation, does the student have difficulties in trusting, bonding, or relating and responding to a variety of people?
10. Because of sensory impairments, is the student unfamiliar with certain common information, so that in order to fully understand concepts or common references used in instruction or conversation, the student frequently needs more explanation than that given to other students?
11. Is the student unable to access the same information as classmates who are not deafblind?

Discussing these questions about the educational team can help identify the barriers to meeting the student’s needs associated with access to information, communication, and emotional support.

1. Does the student’s need for effective deafblind-specific intervention strategies and

communication methods require additional education and training for staff members? If numerous staff will need training, would it be more efficient to concentrate training on fewer specialized individuals?

2. Does the specialized educational programming recommended through assessment and the IEP create a need for an additional trained support person? Before answering this question, examples to consider include, but are not limited to:
3. Due to other demands in the classroom, does the instructor find it difficult to remain in close enough proximity so the student can maintain visual, auditory, and or tactile access to instruction;
4. Due to the needs of other students, does the instructor find it challenging to adjust the pace of instruction so the deafblind student has enough time to get understandable information through either modified communication

or tactile/close-vision exploration;

5. Do any instructors have difficulty or unfamiliarity with the student's preferred communication modes (e.g. tactile symbols, sign language, tactile sign);
6. Does existing staff find it challenging to schedule time for deafblind-specific material adaptation and equipment maintenance (e.g., communication aids, vision devices, hearing devices, etc.).
7. Is it challenging to limit the number of individuals working with the student so that he or she can form trusting relationships?
8. Is it challenging for the team to be consistent due to the large number of individuals working with the student?
9. Is it challenging for the team to provide necessary background and fill-in information to help the student fully understand instruction and conversation across all settings?

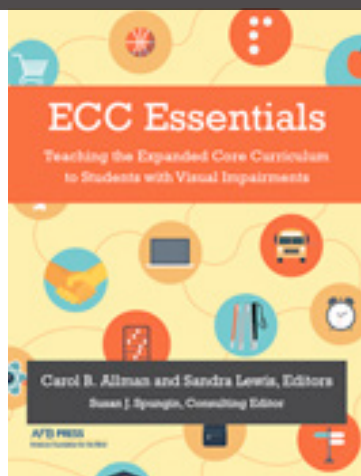
## AFB PRESS LAUNCHES NEW BOOK

Barbara J. Madrigal, Assistant Commissioner, DARS-Division for Blind Services (DBS)

Key Words: Blind, Visually impaired, Expanded Core Curriculum, students with visual impairments

### **ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments**

For teachers of students with visual impairments, heading back to school means thinking about the expanded core curriculum, and how to implement it in the classroom. In support of this



This article provides information about a new resource on the ECC available from AFB Press.

effort, AFB Press is proud to announce the book release of ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments. Learn about our new resource for teachers, ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments, Carol B. Allman and Sandra Lewis, Editors and Susan J. Spungin, Consulting Editor. ECC Essentials is available for order now at [www.afb.org/store](http://www.afb.org/store).

# BUILDING STATEWIDE CAPACITY THROUGH ELECTRONIC MEDIA

William Dougherty, Superintendent, TSBVI

Key Words: TSBVI, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, distance education, broadcast technologies, webinars

Superintendent Daugherty explores the opportunities and benefits of distance education through broadcast technologies.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been involved in a variety of broadcast and web based seminars and trainings for at least the past five years. We have learned much about how this is done, often through trial and error, and now have considerable expertise among the staff most involved with it. But we have long been aware that to do it well and on a larger scale, TSBVI needs to bring in more specialists who are trained in the area of media-based production and delivery.

As a special purpose school with a single focus of educating students who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind both on our campus and statewide, we have been given the opportunity to develop a wide-range of expertise on teaching methodologies and the supports needed to put them into practice. TSBVI has also been a hub of collaboration with the many outstanding educators across the state who are similarly interesting in sharing what they have learned with others trying to improve educational outcomes. The result of these factors is that there is an amazing body of knowledge which has developed in our state that often goes unnoticed and unknown because there is not a mechanism to disseminate it in a way that reliably reaches all of the people who would benefit from it. To address this issue TSBVI is seeking funding in the upcoming legislative session that will equip the school to move rapidly into an increased electronic media presence.

The Building Statewide Capacity Initiative is intended to use distance education and broadcast technologies to support schools and families striving to provide better school outcomes for students who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind across Texas. The vast geography of the state and the need to have access to high quality information wherever people live and on their own schedule, must be met with new service delivery models. The Initiative will develop and produce webinars, video broadcasts, training videos on demand, and other means to equip teachers and parents with skills and information necessary to support the highly specialized learning needs of these students. The Initiative will also provide direct instruction and support via on-line courses and webinars for students statewide modeled after, and managed by, the school's Short Term Programs (STP) Department. As such, its initial intent with students will be supplemental and at ISD request, just as STPs are today. Based upon ISD interest it is our hope to develop the capacity to expand this to more formalized approaches to help students and their teachers statewide to meet both academic and IEP goals.

Key in this initiative is a request for additional funding to ensure that Texas Tech and Stephen F. Austin State Universities are increasing their output of new Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists via stipends to replace those leaving the field. The Initiative will support these new educators once they are working in Texas schools using

the successful statewide mentoring model long-established by TSBVI and the two universities. This is in realization that no initiative by TSBVI can reach its potential unless every one of our state's 9,127-and-growing students has adequate access to well-trained TVI and COMS regardless of where they live in Texas.

As with many things good that have come from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, it

has been the input of statewide stakeholders that have driven it. This is especially true when those stakeholders have an interest in collaborating with TSBVI, sharing their energy and expertise for the benefit of all. We look forward to hearing from you about what you may already be doing in this area, and how we might work together to build the capacity of this promising way of communication within our community.

## LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Barbara J. Madrigal, Assistant Commissioner, DARS-Division for Blind Services (DBS)

**Key Words:** Division for Blind Services, TSVBI, Family Leadership Training Series, independence, self-sufficiency

**Editor's note:** Assistant Commissioner Barbara J. Madrigal submitted this article before her retirement in September 2014.

Many of you are familiar with the proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for the day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." No saying or proverb could better represent DBS' approach and belief in training. Training is the cornerstone to independence and self-sufficiency. Training at DBS comes in a variety of forms. It may be as simple as showing a parent the many ways to use a developmental toy with their infant, to the comprehensive training an adult receives from a DBS specialist. DBS focuses on the needs of the consumers to be successful and to help them reach their goals. We provide training in individual and group settings. In the Blind Children's and

In this article Assistant Commissioner Madrigal discuss how the Division for Blind Services, TSBVI and Educational Services Centers work together to provide quality training to help family members become well-informed competent leaders.

Transition programs, we not only provide training to consumers, we often include the whole family in training sessions depending on the information and skills being taught.

Providing this training leads consumers to be empowered, to be their own advocate, determine the course they want to follow,

reach their goals, set even bigger goals and be an excellent role model for their friends, family and community. We see amazing successes and incredible potential daily. We know that within our consumers lie new leaders in the area of blindness and visual impairment.

For a number of years the Blind Children's and Transition programs have been involved with the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) Family Leadership Series. TSBVI, DBS and various Education Service Centers work together to help family members become well-informed competent leaders. Parents have the

opportunity to attend the following workshops/ training sessions:

**Eye Play**—designed for parents with younger children (birth to five years). This training is an overview of the special education system and how to become an effective partner. It is full of basic information, giving parents an opportunity to meet other parents of children with visual impairments; it also encourages families to envision the possibilities for their children. Family members become knowledgeable about active learning techniques and materials that teach concepts leading to communication and literacy for children with vision and/or hearing loss, including those with other disabilities.

**IDEAL Partners**—Quality Education for your Child with Sensory Impairments - This training in an in-depth workshop on the special education process, how to read and understand their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), discover strategies that leads to positive outcomes for their child's education and to build their confidence in their role as a member of their educational team.

**Personal Family Leadership Series**—This four weekend training is designed not only to help parents and other adult family members (siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) in becoming more knowledgeable and stronger advocates for their children, but also how to step outside their comfort zone to be leaders in the community. The theme of the training is Know Yourself, Know Your Child, and Know Your Community. It provides training in the areas of peer mentoring, raising a child with a visual impairment and deafblindness, quality educational programming and utilizing community resources. The goal is for family members to join with others to improve

and shape services not only for their child, but other children across the state.

**Family Leadership within Different Systems Series**—this is the advanced level of the family leadership training. Over the course of three weekends participants meet leaders in the areas of legislative, medical, state agency, community, and educational systems; learn about various leadership opportunities within existing systems; and, broaden their understanding of the issues surrounding visual impairments and blindness beyond their own child. In this training the participants design, develop and complete a personal project that will impact services and support for children with visual impairments.

The Family Leadership training began at TSBVI in 2004 as part of the Texas Deafblind Project grant initiative. Over the years the training grew and included families of children who were blind and visually impaired. In the past ten years more than 160 parents have participated in the training. Family Leadership is not just about educating; it is much more. Parents learn to match their passions and talents to leadership opportunities so they can effectively partner with others in accomplishing their goals. Some of the powerful and exciting things that have come from the Leadership training include:

- Developed the Texas CHARGERS, a statewide organization for families who have children with CHARGE Syndrome, which hosts an annual family conference and is active in both state and national efforts to improve the lives of people living with CHARGE Syndrome.
- Established non-profit organizations that provide services to children with visual impairments

- Assumed leadership roles within the Texas legislative process that lead to the passage of numerous bills that improve services for Texans who are blind, such as the deafblind/multiple disabilities waiver and the new orientation and mobility law requiring an evaluation on all students receiving vision services.
- Served as board members for many community and state organizations such as the Deafblind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI), the TSBVI Board of Directors and the Texas Parent to Parent Board of Directors.
- Designed and presented breakout sessions

at multiple training events and conferences such as the Texas Parent to Parent Annual Conference, Texas Focus and the International AERBVI Conference.

- Served within their local school districts on boards and advisory committees.

People across the nation have been watching Texas and have borrowed from our success. Family leadership trainings similar to the TSBVI/DARS leadership training have been developed in many states including New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington. It is exciting to know that across this great nation more and more consumers and family members are making the world a better place for people who are blind and visually impaired.

## 2014 - 2015 TSBVI OUTREACH PROGRAMS UPDATE

Cyral Miller, Director of Outreach, TSBVI

Key Words: TSBVI, trainings, study groups, SenseAbilities, blind, low vision, CVI, Braille

In this article, Ms. Miller shares information about the new and exciting things happening at TSBV's Outreach.

As educational systems change, so too do the supports local programs need from TSBVI Outreach. We have added a few new types of assistance you can request from TSBVI's Outreach Programs. If you don't see what you need below, please give me a call or send an email and I'll see how we can help. You can reach me at 512-206-9242 or millerc@tsbvi.edu.

### NEW STRATEGIES

**On-the-go training**—TSBVI is able to share training after the live event, by posting on the [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) website. This greatly increases

access to training to a 24/7 option! Starting no later than the beginning of 2015, we will launch a new online registration system that will simplify registration, tracking training and getting

credit and certificates. With new staff Andy Weir and Nathan Widener joining Kendra Dorty and Kate Hurst in Outreach, and a new webmaster, Stacey Rayos, taking over the TSBVI website management, our ability to offer web-based options and to make those available quickly in accessible formats will significantly increase. Contact Kate Hurst at [hurstk@tsbvi.edu](mailto:hurstk@tsbvi.edu) if you have questions.

**Study groups**—It can be hard to incorporate new techniques into your teaching. TSBVI Outreach is facilitating a wide range of study groups this year.



These are regularly scheduled, short (typically an hour or 1 1/2 hours) online gatherings to delve into topical areas in bite-sized portions. Participants can share how they have introduced a new active learning strategy, model their CVI assessment and ask for feedback from peers, discuss a portion of the Sensory Learning Kit, or learn a new technique to produce quality braille graphics. You can find a list of study groups and register to attend at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/on-the-go-learning/webinar-listings>.

**Increasing online presence**—You may already be noticing that TSBVI is making major changes to the <http://www.tsbvi.edu> website. The Outreach pages now focus more on helping you find your way to our services. Most of the informational postings are moving into redesigned resources and on-the-go (formerly distance) learning sections. We will continue our wonderful partnership with the Perkins School for the Blind on the Paths to Literacy website, found at <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org> ( External link ). We will be posting more accessible web-based trainings, and increasing our social media presence with Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, among others. The blogs for assistive technology and orientation and mobility will continue to be posted - look for them to move to a new location on the new website.

**You can still get the TXSenseAbilities newsletter online**—sign up at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities> to get notified as each new issue comes out. If you prefer a paper copy, there is a subscription option as well, free for parents of children with visual impairment and/or deafblindness. This year we will go to a twice a year publication schedule.

## TOPICAL INITIATIVES

**Low Vision**—Students with low vision often appear to need less direct instruction and while getting by academically, may graduate school missing critical skills to access their world. Dr. Cindy Bachofer, certified low vision therapist and TVI, is now working with Outreach Programs to provide a new level of statewide support in the area of low vision. We anticipate a statewide conference in May, bringing Low Vision on the Road to selected regional areas, evidence based strategy recommendations and new resources to increase access for students with low vision. Contact Cindy Bachofer at [bachoferc@tsbvi.edu](mailto:bachoferc@tsbvi.edu) with your low vision questions.

**CVI clinics**—TSBVI Outreach is partnering with Diane Sheline to offer up to three clinics for young children with cortical visual impairments at participating regional ESCs. The clinics will be for babies, 0-3 years. CVI Intervention is very successful in this age range and we would like to assist Teachers of the Visually Impaired to start interventions as soon as possible. The TVI will come with the parent(s) and child, and develop, with support, a draft CVI assessment report following the Christine Roman template, including a description of the child's CVI characteristics as well as appropriate interventions to try. Contact Sara Kitchen ([kitchens@tsbvi.edu](mailto:kitchens@tsbvi.edu)) and/or Ann Rash ([Rasha@tsbvi.edu](mailto:Rasha@tsbvi.edu)) with your CVI questions.

**Braille Production support**—Producing braille in proper formats takes special skill. Transcribers and TVIs and COMS all across the state struggle to match formats to the diverse learning media now being presented to students at earlier ages. With the coming of the new UEB code, there are new formats to master. A study group and trainings

focused on these skills are available this year, and new materials to support braille production are under development. Contact Pat van Geem in Outreach ([vangeemp@tsbvi.edu](mailto:vangeemp@tsbvi.edu)) or Sue Mattson in Comprehensive Programs ([mattsons@tsbvi.edu](mailto:mattsons@tsbvi.edu)) with your braille production questions.

**New people and new positions**—There have been some shifts within Outreach and new people coming in to take the place of those who left. The TX Deafblind Project had a lot of changes: Holly Cooper is now providing technical assistance for infants & toddlers with deafblindness, while Matt Schultz and Adam Graves have joined the TX Deafblind Project for school-aged program support. Also, Chris Tabb has moved into the Outreach Programs as our newest statewide O&M consultant, and will be on his own after

Ruth Ann Marsh leaves at the end of November. Sharon Nichols has returned to a primary focus on assistive technology and can help you with AT questions and tech loan requests.

Some things don't change. While increasing our online efforts, we know that sometimes, it is the personal interactions that make the most difference. TSBVI Outreach staff is still available to provide one of our highest rated services: on-site school consultation at your local program, as well as trainings on a wide range of topics. To request a visit, to ask for family support, or to request training, please go to <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach>.

We look forward to working with you this year!

## DEAFBLIND PORTAL

The Council for Exceptional Children DVIDB

Key Words: Council for Exceptional Children, deafblind, blind, visually impaired

Excerpts from the Council for Exceptional Children DVIDB:

<http://community.cec.sped.org/DVI/dbportal>

The Council for Exceptional Children, the Voice and Vision of Special Education has established a

This article provides information on the deafblind portal on the Council for Exceptional Children's website.

professional home for deafblindness in the Division on Visual Impairment and Deafblindness. This portal promotes partnership in professional development and advocacy. It provides an opportunity for university/college instructors, students, teachers, interveners and families to learn about and share current developments and innovations in deafblindness. The portal features news and events and has a Deafblind Community Google Group.

# TX SenseAbilities

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## PRODUCTION STAFF

### **Editors-in-Chief**

David Wiley (512) 206-9219  
davidwiley@tsbvi.edu  
Holly Cooper (512) 206-9217  
hollycooper@tsbvi.edu

### **Editor's Assistant**

Beth Bible (512)206-9103  
bethbible@tsbvi.edu

### **DARS-DBS Editor**

Gay Speake (512) 533-7103  
Gay.Speake@dars.state.tx.us

### **Website Editor**

Jim Allan (512) 206-9315  
jimallan@tsbvi.edu

### **Spanish Edition Editor**

Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418  
jeanrobinson@tsbvi

### **Section Editors**

#### ***Family Wisdom Editors***

Edgenie Bellah (512) 206-9423  
edgeniebellah@tsbvi.edu  
Jean Robinson (512) 206-9418  
jeanrobinson@tsbvi.edu

#### ***Effective Practices Editors***

Sharon Nichols (512) 206-9342  
sharonnichols@tsbvi.edu  
Holly Cooper (512) 206-9217  
hollycooper@tsbvi.edu

#### ***News & Views Editor***

Gay Speake (512) 533-7103  
Gay.Speake@dars.state.tx.us



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