

# TX SenseAbilities

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

Spring/Summer 2016

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# An Extraordinary Life: Tribute to Travis

*Editor's Note/Abstract: A natural and yet painful part of being part of a community is saying goodbye to beloved leaders. In December 2015, the Texas Deafblind Community lost a wonderful young man who led us by his example of how to live an extraordinary life on his terms. Following are two eulogies given by educators who had the privilege of working with Travis Dafft and his family for many years.*

*Keywords: Family wisdom, deafblind, community, quality of life, family leadership, self-determination, death*

volunteer work, job exploration, and a business plan.

## Moments of Joy: Travis' Life Defined

Jenny Lace, Deafblind Education Consultant, retired, Texas Deafblind Project

Looking out at you who have come together today, I see beautiful, bright, fun colors. I feel we are collectively sending a message to Travis that says the gang's all here. It has been said that loneliness is the only real disability. Travis has always had a gang to hang with...

Through my career in deafblindness, I had the opportunity to connect with Travis, his dynamic mom and family when he was six years old. From the beginning, I knew I was much more on the receiving end of this relationship. I remember arriving at their home the first time to a fragrant herb garden and a home full of opportunities for exploration and participation. Travis grew, the house grew, the gang grew, and I grew. Over the years Travis' herb garden and numerous other projects turned into



*Photo of Travis Dafft*

You hear people ask, quite often, how can I find happiness and live a quality life? Jan van Dijk, the "Father" of Deafblindness asks: Well, what is quality of life? Is it having 30,000

words? Is it being a Mathematician? He answers: No, it is to be a positive person. And when are you a positive person? It's when you have in your life Moments of Joy. Travis lived life as a positive person sharing Millions of Moments of Joy. A few of those moments include:

**The Joy of Community:** Travis enjoyed many activities in the community: chef classes, dance classes and more. Through his participation and determination, Travis motivated athletes, peers, and others to do their best.

**The Joy of Generosity:** Travis was able to not only receive but he was also able to give back to others. He experienced the joy of being generous through small and big deeds. Everything from offering a choice of beverage to his Dad after work to making meals for the homeless.

**The Joy of Individuality:** Travis was his own person. He had an engaging personality that touched the lives of many. He could let you know what he liked and what he didn't like. There was that grin, telling eye gaze, and that Elvis smirk.

I'm sure you will be sharing many more moments of Joy you experienced with Travis during the reception and for years to come. Travis was never at risk for loneliness nor a life defined by educational files and assessments. His life story is full of interesting story lines and fun characters like you. Travis lives on as we hold his stories in our hearts and retell them.

## Memories of Travis

Andrea Cyr, Teacher, Conroe Independent School District

My name is Andrea Cyr. I had the wonderful pleasure of being one of Travis' teachers for many years. I started working with him when he attended Collins Intermediate School and continued to work with him until he graduated. I learned so much about Travis over the years and he taught me more than you could ever imagine!

Before I share some of those special memories, I wanted to take a minute to talk about Travis and his family. Travis was an incredible, handsome young man with a wonderful personality! He was full of life, and had a great sense of humor! Travis usually ran the show according to his rules. Travis was a fighter! He endured more than most of us will ever endure throughout our entire life, and he always faced it with courage and strength. We are so fortunate that God let us enjoy Travis for almost 25 years. He touched so many lives in so many ways while he was on this earth.

Travis was a family man! He loved his family! I was fortunate enough to see how he interacted with them and how much they meant to him. He would light up when they walked in the room and spoke to him. When he was younger, he enjoyed going to the air shows and watching trains with his dad. They had a special bond that couldn't be denied when they were together. Travis was Jennifer's Boo Man and she could always make him smile no matter what! Jennifer was always there when Travis needed her. He absolutely adored his big sister! Bill, I remember every Christmas, Travis and I would go shopping for his gifts,

and he couldn't wait to get to the tool department to buy you a new tool. He loved his brother-in-law! Travis adored being an uncle! When the kids came over, Travis would sit up straight and tall and he was so proud as he listened to them run around and play. Jackson and Christian would always come up to him and say "Hi Uncle Travy," and he would get this huge smile on his face from ear to ear! But there is one person in this world who knew Travis better than anyone, and that was his mom, Teresa. I've never known a mom who fought so hard for her child! Teresa always made sure that Travis got what he needed to be successful. She was the most creative and innovative parent that I've ever met! Travis loved his mom with all of his heart and I know that he is in heaven now thanking God that Teresa was his mom. He's looking down right now and telling her not to worry. He's walking and talking and flying with the angels.

Now I want to share a few special memories that I shared with Travis. I could talk for hours, but I've narrowed it down to three that I remember the most. The first memory that I will never forget is the time that Travis basically kicked me out and told me to leave. Now, most of you know that Travis could be a little manipulative, to say the least! Occasionally, when he didn't want to work, he would shut down and pretend he was sleeping. He was an expert at this. Sometimes he was so good that I had to ask Teresa if he was really asleep or if he was faking it. One particular day, I knew for sure that he was faking it. I tried everything to capture his interest that day, but he just kept pretending that he was sleeping. When frustration started to set in, I said "Travis, are you going to work today?" I've never seen a person wake up so fast. He cocked that head

up and to the right in lightning speed! For those of you who don't know, that was the way Travis said NO! So, jokingly, I looked right at him and said, "Travis, do you want me to leave?" He gave me the biggest smile and gave me his sign for yes faster than I had ever seen him answer. Usually he needed some wait time before he would answer, but that day, he answered immediately, so I asked him again, "Travis, do you really want me to leave?" This time, he not only smiled and said yes, but he vocalized with pleasure. I knew we were getting nowhere that day, but I wanted to feel like I won, so I said "Travis James Dafft, you little toot! I wanted to leave anyway!" As I drove home and processed what just happened, I got this overwhelming feeling of joy! First of all, I realized that Travis had mastered one of his goals. He answered three questions without any wait time at all. Secondly, what a great self-advocate! Travis sure told me that day! He taught me a valuable lesson! He made me realize how important it is to take the time to listen to our students. I think Travis was testing me to see if I would really listen. When I did, he respected me more. From that day on, he never did that again, because he knew that I would take the time to listen to what he was telling me.

The second memory I want to talk about is our yearly tradition. Every year, we would make a gingerbread house for Christmas. One year, we proceeded to make our traditional gingerbread house, but Travis had other ideas in mind! That sense of humor decided to peak that day. We finally attached the last part of the roof. I turned to get the candy and when I turned back around, Travis had that evil look on his face. Before I could move the house, he did it! He reached that sneaky hand up and



knocked that roof off. Patiently, I helped him reattach the roof, and I kid you not, within seconds, he did the same thing again, and again, and again! So after the fourth or fifth time of attaching the roof and him knocking it off, I looked at him and said “What is your deal?” I stopped for a brief moment and remembered the day that he told me to leave, and I said, I’m not listening! Travis is telling me that he doesn’t want to make a traditional gingerbread house, so I need to take his lead. He gave me that smirk and I knew we would have to come up with a different option! I can’t remember what year this happened, but it was shortly after Hurricane Katrina, so we made a Katrina gingerbread house, equipped with blue tarp for the roof and knocked down trees. Travis was a happy camper with the finished product.

Now, for the final memory, and the one that is most dear to my heart! Well, as most of you know, Travis learned best by doing unit studies. We would study one subject for 3 or 4 weeks, or sometimes longer. Our favorite unit was when we studied Louisiana. We learned about the culture, the traditions, the language, the food, the music, and Mardi Gras. We cooked jambalaya and beignets, but Travis’ favorite was the king cake, and boy what a king cake he made! He had the bright idea that he wanted to put a filling in the center, so we decided to make a cream cheese filling. Wow!

We stuffed that cake so full of filling that one bite was probably 500 calories! It was so delicious and I’ll never forget all of the sugar that Travis spattered everywhere! We definitely loved making that overstuffed Texas King Cake! One of our favorite things we studied during this unit was the music. There’s nothing like Cajun, Zydeco music. We started out listening to traditional Cajun, French music and then we moved on to more modern Zydeco music. There was one song in particular that became our song, and we used to listen to it every time I came over. In fact, Ginger used the music to that song to write Travis’ graduation song. It was by an artist named Horace Trahan. That song was called “That Butt Thing.” No matter what kind of mood Travis was in, all you had to do was play that song, and he would come alive! Because this song was so special to Travis, we wanted to play it for you now.

In closing, it was Travis’ sense of humor and personality that I will miss the most! I will always remember the special times we shared together and all of the things that Travis taught me! He will be missed tremendously! By the way, I downloaded “That Butt Thing” to my phone, so whenever I’m missing him, I can just play that song and remember all of the great times we had!

# Where Campers Learn “I Can”: 20 Summers of Athletic Empowerment at Camp Abilities

Part II, Anne Schultz

*Abstract: Camp Abilities is an overnight, developmental sports camp for children and youth with visual impairments, blindness, or deafblindness. Their first goal is to empower blind, visually impaired, and deafblind children and youth to become active in sports.*

Keywords: camp abilities, blind, visually impaired, adapted physical education, adapted sports

## How It All Began

Camp Abilities was founded in 1996 by Dr. Lieberman, a Distinguished Service Professor in the kinesiology, sport studies, and physical education department at SUNY-Brockport. Dr. Lieberman’s interest in working with children who are visually impaired was inspired by Dr. Lepore, a professor in the department of kinesiology at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. When Dr. Lieberman was a student at West Chester, Dr. Lepore conducted a sports program for children with visual impairments each semester. Dr. Lieberman volunteered in the program and found that “working with someone with visual impairment was so different from anything I had done before.” “It was so rewarding, I knew I wanted to do it for the rest of my life.”

After obtaining her master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse, Dr.

Lieberman taught and coached at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. At Perkins, she gained first-hand experience in living and working with children with visual impairments and deafblindness. After she obtained her doctorate from Oregon State University, she landed at SUNY-Brockport, where she soon discovered that few students were graduating with experience in teaching people with visual impairments. She wrote a grant proposal and soon won funding from the Dorothea Haus Ross Foundation for a sports camp for children with visual impairments.

From this and other funding sources, Camp Abilities was born. With the help of Dr. Lepore, the first camp was held in 1996 at SUNY-Brockport and included 27 children, ages 9 to 18 years, and 30 volunteers. As local demand grew, Camp Abilities Brockport soon expanded to include 50 athletes. Soon the demand went national, and another camp using the same model, Camp Abilities Alaska, was established in Wasilla, Alaska in 2002. A third Camp

Abilities soon sprang up in Tucson, Arizona in 2004.

Since then, the camps have kept mushrooming, from the most recent in Saratoga, New York in 2014 to locations as far away as Ireland, Finland, and Portugal. Dr. Lieberman's goal is to have a camp within a half-day's drive for every child with a visual impairment—in short, 50 camps in all 50 states. (For a complete list of Camp Abilities locations, visit <http://www.campabilities.org/other-camps.html>.)



*Photo of students doing water aerobics*

## **A Lasting Impact**

Participants in the Camp Abilities experience are profoundly affected for the long term. Often, athletes become involved in their schools' athletics programs after their camp experience. As they become more involved, members of their community begin to recognize them as athletes deserving of respect. Beth Foster, a long-time coach and now assistant director at two Camp Abilities locations explains, "It's such a powerful thing to have all these athletes with visual impairments at a camp together and to tell them, 'Yes, you can!' All their lives, people have been telling

them 'You can't do that.' I have seen people come back every year and have seen them grow, break through walls and barriers, and say, 'I can do this.' It's amazing, really powerful. And I get that same feeling at every camp I do," Foster exults.

For Briggs, who is blind due to cone-rod dystrophy, Camp Abilities has "given me a whole different road I can take," he says. "I never saw myself coaching a sport, but now I've learned that I really enjoy it." Briggs—who is studying sports management at New York's Alfred University, where he is on the track team—has been serving as a sort of talent scout, traveling to the various Camp Abilities locations to find gifted athletes with potential to excel at competitive sports events.

Foster says Camp Abilities has been a transformative experience for her, too. "If it changes my life this much, I can only imagine how much it can change [athletes' lives]," she notes.

## **You, Too, Can Start a Camp Abilities**

Camp Abilities has developed a replicable model and manual for starting another location anywhere in the world. Sometimes camps are even founded by parents of children with visual impairments who want their children to have the Camp Abilities experience close to home.

To be called "Camp Abilities," the camp must be a sports camp for children whose primary disability is a visual impairment. Dr. Lieberman advises anyone who is interested in starting such a camp to begin by assembling a committed team and then reviewing the book she co-wrote with Haley Schedlin, M.S.: *Sports*



*for Everyone: A Handbook for Starting Sports Camps for Children with Visual Impairments.*

The next task is to find a facility to host the camp. The facility must have enough space to accommodate the sports you plan to offer. Then, pick a date. Starting off with a long weekend and a small number of athletes works best, Lieberman advises. When the facility and date have been established, it's time to divide up responsibilities among your team. These responsibilities will include food; equipment; orientation; health and safety; fundraising; and recruiting athletes, counselors, orientation and mobility specialists, teachers of children with visual impairments, sport specialists, and role models as speakers.

Another important step is to design a camp T-shirt and logo. The logo can reference something unique to the camp or to the local area. From there, the planning team should meet to report on progress in fulfilling responsibilities. At first, these meetings should occur once a month, then more frequently as the camp date moves closer. And finally, once the date and place have been decided, contact Dr. Lieberman at [llieberm@brockport.edu](mailto:llieberm@brockport.edu) with

the dates, relevant contact information, and website so that they can post the information on their Camp Abilities website and help spread the word.

If all this sounds daunting, rest assured that the effort is worth it. "It takes so much preparation, planning, and fundraising, but the scene every year of the athletes and coaches' not wanting to say goodbye makes it all worthwhile," Dr. Lepore says.

### **Learn More**

Even if you can't start a camp, Camp Abilities would like to invite all readers of this article to join the Camp Abilities family by volunteering for an existing program and/or by encouraging any child you know with a visual impairment to register for camp. Camp Abilities is also raising funds to produce a documentary on its camps all over the world and to mark its twentieth season; to contribute, visit <http://www.gofundme.com/campabilities>.

For more information and a complete list of Camp Abilities locations with contact information, visit <http://www.campabilities.org>.

## **Disability is No Laughing Matter**

Emily Parma

***Abstract: A college student with a visual impairment shares her experience coping with people who joke about disabilities.***

*Editor's Note: I met Emily when she agreed to serve on a panel for a family workshop. I was impressed with her accomplishments, her*

*confidence and saw her passion for mentoring others with low vision. Emily is a junior at Texas State University in San Marcos, studying*

*Special Education and Sociology. She currently works at a children's nursery. Outside of work, she loves writing, spending time with her fiancé and being outdoors with their two dogs. She enjoys helping animals and people in any way possible! You may contact Emily at [egp17@txstate.edu](mailto:egp17@txstate.edu).*

Keywords: family wisdom, blind, low vision, disability, bullying

Enough is enough. There are so many students with disabilities, and I know I'm not the only one. Some may be visible, some may not be. Yet there has not been a week that went by without me overhearing a joke about ADHD, Helen Keller or being deaf. What people don't realize is that others around them might have a disability.

Personally, I am legally blind, and while some people may not realize it, others may make fun of it. Sometime last year, I remember stumbling over words on the ever popular Cards Against Humanity game when someone remarked, "What, are you blind?" Yes, actually, I am to an extent, I remember thinking. I used to shake off those remarks like they didn't bother me. In reality, those words hurt – not because I have a disability, but because of the attitude that person had about it.



*Photo of Emily Parma*

I have to wonder why those remarks are even worth saying and what someone would gain from it.

Having a disability, it seems like people either categorize me as a hero who overcomes it or a person who is unable to do anything at all because I'm different. At least that's how I interpret people's actions and attitudes. This mindset is actually quite harmful.

Someone says hurtful things like a blind joke and might try to cover it up by saying, "It's a joke." But I believe every joke has an element of truth for the person who said it. I'd like to think I'm as perfectly capable as any other able-bodied person in this world. I just have to adapt to my surroundings in ways others don't. Hearing blind jokes makes me feel set apart from everyone else, like having something to deal with in life is something to laugh at. This should not be the case.

Not everyone has interacted with someone with a disability, however, so maybe the problem isn't the people who say them, but not knowing the jokes are a problem in the first place.

"Did you hear about the new Helen Keller doll? You wind her up and she bumps into the furniture!" This is not the worst of the most common jokes about Helen Keller I've heard. I'm sure some of you reading this may find that joke funny, but to me, Helen Keller was an incredible woman. She achieved so much despite many people thinking she was incapable of doing anything. The truth is, every person has things to overcome in life, whether they're financial problems, family problems, or a challenge that might be related to his or her

disability. None of these are a laughing matter, so why make it that way?

No one likes to be seen as different or incapable compared to other people, and this is exactly what joking or teasing can do to a person. Personally, I don't mind talking about my disability, but I don't like people staring or making jokes about it, and I don't believe anyone else does either. I often hear people exclaiming, "Wow, I'm blind!" when they can't find an object that happens to be in front of them. More often than not, that person is

actually not disabled, and it bothers me because they know nothing about that disability.

No matter how much a disability affects someone's life, I believe every one of us would rather be looked at as a person with interests, values and opinions just like anyone else. Having a disability means we adapt to our surroundings in ways others do not, and that makes us unique. People should be more aware of what they say, and remember that age-old saying of "think before you speak," because what you say does actually matter.

## From Home, to School and Into the Community

Denitra Rideaux, Family Leader, Rockdale

*Abstract: Following is a presentation Denitra and Trey gave at the 10th Annual Texas Chargers Family Retreat. Trey was honored as the 2015 Star Charger. On behalf of the Texas SenseAbilities editorial committee, we celebrate along with the Texas Chargers community all that Trey has accomplished through the years.*

Key words: family wisdom, deafblind, Charge Syndrome, self-determination, community interaction, vocational development, work

Hello my name is Denitra Rideaux and I am the mother of a young man by the name of Trey Lewis who was born with several obstacles and challenges. Look at how he has been blessed and turned into this wonderful 17 year old and is honored to be the 2015 Star Charger. Our family lives in a small town called Rockdale Texas where the population is about 5,500.

So just imagine with a town that small all we have is a Walmart and 1 grocery store. We love living in a small town because everyone knows everyone and Trey is well known in this town. He loves music with playing the keyboard, listening to Pandora, pasta, Mexican food, riding horses, participating in rodeos, winning trophies and ribbons, attending the Sports Extravaganza for the blind and visually impaired where he has won several medals over the years, getting his hair cut and going to church.

Currently he is a student at TSBVI in Austin Texas and loves attending there and has grown in so many areas and has gained so many skills. Some of his favorite things he likes to do at TSBVI are swimming, obstacle course and exercise in PE, grinding coffee beans, animal care and recycling.

Recycling is his favorite and is something he does on a daily basis. So last summer Trey's teachers came out to our home before school was out to see how can we set up a summer schedule by incorporating some of the activities from school to home. We sat down and brainstormed how to set up a weekly schedule of activities on certain days. We had the same events on the calendar for the whole summer on each particular day. Some of the activities that we incorporated were exercise by walking around the track, swimming, watering plants, and recycling. Recycling was on a daily basis and was Trey's all-time favorite.

What we did to set up Trey's recycling service was to talk with my Pastor at our church and Trey's barber to see if we can set up a poster with Trey's picture on it and a plastic recycling bucket underneath the poster. They both agreed and were excited for Trey. So what started out small has now grown into something big. It is now still going on and we will need to get bigger recycle buckets because our community has really stepped up and have enjoyed helping Trey with providing bags and bags of recycling.

During the school year Trey's day to recycle is on Tuesday but we now have to add more days during the school year during the week because we can't keep up with it only going the 1 day. I have people from the community who have heard about his service and they will call or come by my job and ask what can they do to help this young man and where can they take their items. I love seeing how everyone is getting involved and wants to make a difference in his life.

This is something we will continue and would like to expand by collecting cans because DARS, Division for Blind Services recently heard about his service and asked if they can purchase a can crusher. Of course we were delighted about that so we now have a can crusher and this will be another additional service we will try to add for the summer. All the funds from the can crushing will go towards Trey's shopping because this young man loves to shop.

I want to thank TSBVI for helping our family find something that Trey is not forced to do but loves to do. Recycling makes him feel and know that he is accomplishing something, and that makes him feel whole and complete. When Trey no longer has school due to being an adult, our goals are to already have something in place to keep him active, give him a sense of fulfillment, and help him know that all things are possible. Just because you have a disability, it does not mean there are not possibilities.

# Meet Your Texas Family Organizations For the Visually Impaired and Deafblind Communities

*Abstract: A list of family and advocacy organizations in Texas, along with brief descriptions*

Keywords: family wisdom, family engagement, family organizations

Being part of a family engagement network is a powerful way to learn while being encouraged, mentored and inspired. We are fortunate to have many family organizations active at both the state and national level on issues important to our communities, such as working on the passage of the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act. A complete list and video introductions can be found at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/selected-topics/family-organizations>. Following are the organizations in Texas serving Visually Impaired/Blind and Deafblind Communities.

## Visual Impairment



### **Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI)**

TAPVI is an affiliate of NAPVI. We are a non-profit organization that provides support to the families of children who have blindness or visual impairments, including those with additional

disabilities. TAPVI enables families to find information and resources, as well as connect and network with one another. We offer leadership, support, and training to assist families in helping children reach their full potential in school and in the community. View a video from TAPVI.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/distance/family-tapvi.html>

Website: [www.tapvi.com](http://www.tapvi.com)

On Facebook, search for the Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI) or go directly to:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/86304819283/>



### **Texas Parents Of Blind Children (TPOBC)**

Texas Parents Of Blind Children is the state chapter of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC), a division of the NFB of Texas, a national membership organization of parents and friends of blind children.

View a video from Texas Parents of Blind Children. <http://www.tsbvi.edu/distance/family-tpobc.html>

Website: [www.tpobc.org/](http://www.tpobc.org/)



## Deafblind



### Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT)

The mission of DBMAT is to promote and improve the quality of life for all Texans who are deaf-blind multi-handicapped, deaf multi-handicapped, and blind multi-handicapped. We support the establishment of educational, rehabilitative, vocational and independent living opportunities.

View a video about DBMAT.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/distance/family-dbmat.html>

Website: [www.dbmat-tx.org](http://www.dbmat-tx.org)



### Texas Chargers, Inc.

The Texas Chargers, Inc. is a group of Texas families, friends, and professionals who are dedicated to helping children and young adults who live with Charge Syndrome. The primary function of our organization is to support the emotional and educational needs of the people with Charge Syndrome and the families and professionals working with them, to provide them with a better quality of life.

View a video from Texas Chargers.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/distance/family-txchargers.html>

Website: [www.texaschargers.org](http://www.texaschargers.org)

## Deaf & Hard of Hearing



### Texas Hands and Voices

Texas Hands & Voices is a chapter of the nationwide non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families and their children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as the professionals who serve them. We are a parent-driven, parent/professional/community collaborative group that is unbiased towards communication modes and methods. Our diverse membership includes those who are deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing impaired and their families who communicate orally, with signs, cue, and/or combined methods. We exist to help our children reach their highest potential. View a video from Texas Hands and Voices.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/distance/family-txhv.html>

Email: [office@txhv.org](mailto:office@txhv.org)

Website: [www.txhandsandvoices.org](http://www.txhandsandvoices.org)

Guide By Your Side Website: [www.txgbys.org](http://www.txgbys.org)

# Outdoor Play: Fun Activities You and Your Child Can Do

Holly Cooper, Ph.D., Early Childhood Specialist, TSBVI Deafblind Outreach

***Abstract:** This article provides suggestions of activities parents, family members, and educators can do outdoors with young students with visual impairments or deafblindness.*

Keywords: play, outdoors, child development

Expand your child's horizons through outdoor play! Whether your child is an infant or an older child who isn't walking yet, outdoor play is an important contributor to their physical development. Being outdoors is enjoyable, stimulating to the sensory system, and beneficial for learning. It will also give your child an opportunity to be together with friends and family members. It can help siblings and other children find interesting ways to play with a child with disabilities who may be shielded from many of the typical experiences of childhood.

Many children don't have much outdoor play time for a variety of reasons. In some cases, it may be the extremes of weather. In Texas it's often too hot in the summer to be outdoors after 11 in the morning. In some cases, there may be allergens such as mold or pollen, or there may be a high ultraviolet light risk. Maybe mosquitos, chiggers, or scorpions are a problem. Maybe harsh vegetation like stickers, cactus, or poison ivy makes the outdoors difficult. In cities, finding safe and comfortable places to play outside can be equally challenging. In spite of this, being outdoors is an important part of the human

experience and is important for child development.

The outdoors is an entirely different sensory experience than being inside. It is a rich and vibrant setting for a blind, visually impaired or deafblind child. The light is brighter, the temperatures are hotter or colder, the breeze or wind blows, sounds are different and more varied, and smells are entirely different. Your child will benefit from outdoor play regardless of their disability or health conditions. Here are some ideas for making outdoor play safe, enjoyable, and a learning experience.

### **Make yourself comfortable**

- Find or create shade. If you don't have trees for shade, consider using a shade tent, an overhead arbor, or a covered patio or carport. You can also look at the shade cast by your house at different times of day and set up a play area to take advantage of the shade.
- Find a safe and comfortable surface. For some environments, a small quilt laid over the grass is good. If you are positioning your baby on a concrete patio or driveway, you may want to put down a pad, such as some high density foam

floor squares sold for garage, kitchen and workshop use. These can be covered with a blanket if desired. A blanket or other special surface helps define the space for a child while still allowing her or him to explore beyond the protected space.

## Fun things to do

- Play in a small wading pool. This can be filled with a few inches of water (supervised at all times). If you need a more sturdy option that will last longer than one season, explore outdoor water garden pools. These are usually plastic tubs, black or dark green, with slightly taller and stronger sides. Don't leave water in the pool, as mosquitos and some bacteria love it. Also a pool of water can be a hazard to small animals, who may find their way in, but can't get out.
- Use a wading pool or other containment structure for sand play. Add small shovels, buckets, nesting cups and other toys to explore texture, size, and weight and to develop skills such as scooping and pouring. It's good to cover these areas when not in use because cats always seem to find them and use them for their toilet!
- Hang banners and wind socks for your child to watch as they move in the breeze. Hang them low so your baby can reach out and touch them. If there isn't any breeze, put a clip-on fan nearby to create some motion.
- Hang wind chimes for your child to hear. You can make fun home-made ones with your children or by yourself. Ideas for wind chimes can be found on Pinterest and other internet sources made from copper pipe, flower pots, metal washers, old tableware, bells, bamboo, Mason jar lids, metal cans and a variety of other materials. Garden stores often have high quality wind chimes tuned to the musical scale which are more pleasant to hear. Wind chimes which are safe and supervised can be hung within your child's reach for fun multisensory play.
- Bubbles can be lots of fun for children with vision. I have been surprised many times by the children who are able to see them and enjoy them even with a very significant visual impairment. The reflective surface and movement means many children with cortical visual impairment may respond to bubbles enthusiastically. Also consider plastic long-lasting touchable bubbles. With plastic bubbles children with and without vision can touch, bounce, throw, and play for an extended time. These bubbles last longer than typical bubbles, but adult supervision is advised.
- Bird feeders are also settings for a lot of action for observers with vision. For those who benefit more from sound, they can also be noisy and tuneful. I have a bird feeder hanging from a tree in my front yard. I put fresh seed in it at seven o'clock every morning, and within an hour the birds and squirrels have come and eaten and left it empty. If you love technology, you can even get a webcam to mount nearby so you can get a close look at the action. You can share this with a child who has sufficient vision, providing an opportunity to combine technology with an outdoor activity.
- Pets are another good excuse to go outdoors and enjoy some time. Dogs are more reliably cooperative if responsible adults train them and form a loving bond with them. I love cats, and my cats will come and hang out with me when I'm outdoors. Even a house rabbit can be put in a small pen and enjoy the outdoors for a while.
- Herb gardens and flower gardens are often recommended for enjoyment by children who are blind or visually impaired. The San Antonio Botanical Garden has a Garden for the Blind

that is enjoyable and a good source of inspiration. In many parts of Texas, herbs will stay green and fragrant year round, or be dormant for just 2 or 3 months in the winter. Some good fragrant herbs to grow include: oregano, rosemary (look for a hardy variety if your area experiences winter temperatures below 25 degrees), mint (I've never experienced it "taking over" a garden because of our hot dry climate), lemon balm, lavender and other culinary herbs.

- Go for a walk and explore the seasons. Know your neighborhood or town and find out where the beautiful places are. If it is the winter holiday season, find out where the good lights and decorations are. If it is spring, find out where the fragrant and colorful flowers are. Are there pets or livestock you can visit on a short walk? Do parks in your neighborhood have trails that are wheelchair or stroller accessible? Walk your dog and your child and get out of your own yard, experience nature and chat with the neighbors.

### Special ideas for extra budgets

- Webcams and video cameras with audio to watch a birdfeeder, nest or other wildlife  
<http://www.amazon.com/Hawk-Eye-Nature-Cam-Wireless/dp/B006JECZ6I>
- Tuned windchimes  
[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=sr\\_nr\\_n\\_1?fst=as%3Aoff&rh=n%3A553806%2Ck%3Atuned+wind+chime&keywords=tuned+wind+chime&ie=UTF8&qid=1456251343&mid=2941120011](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=sr_nr_n_1?fst=as%3Aoff&rh=n%3A553806%2Ck%3Atuned+wind+chime&keywords=tuned+wind+chime&ie=UTF8&qid=1456251343&mid=2941120011)
- Swing sets, modified for babies or individuals who need extra support  
[https://store.schoolspecialty.com/OA\\_HTML/ibeCCtPltmDspRte.jsp?minisite=10206&item=86809&category1=Special+Needs&category2=Active+Play](https://store.schoolspecialty.com/OA_HTML/ibeCCtPltmDspRte.jsp?minisite=10206&item=86809&category1=Special+Needs&category2=Active+Play)
- Plastic bubbles  
<http://www.amazon.com/s?ie=UTF8&page=1&rh=n%3A165793011%2Ck%3Aplastic%20bubbles>

## Teacher of Students with Deafblindness Pilot, Part II

Chris Montgomery, Deafblind Education Specialist, TSBVI Deafblind Outreach

***Abstract: The unique needs of students with deafblindness must be met by teachers who have specialized training and knowledge in the combined effects of hearing and vision loss. This article is Part II on the Teacher of Deafblind Project in Texas and how it has provided training and support to professionals serving students with deafblindness.***

Key Words: deafblindness, deafblind, teacher training, professional preparation, Teacher of the Deafblind (TDB)

There are approximately 750 children in the state of Texas with deafblindness. This is a unique disability which involves a combined

sensory loss. Texas has highly qualified teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH) and highly qualified teachers of students with visual impairment (TVI), each with specific skills and a community of practice. Members of these two teaching disciplines do not necessarily have training specific to deafblindness, however. The unique and varied educational needs of students with deafblindness must be met by teachers who have specialized training and knowledge in the *combined effects* of hearing and vision loss. Utah and Illinois formally recognize the role of teachers of the deafblind, but at this time there is no certification for a teacher of the deafblind (TDB) in Texas.

### **Description of the Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project**

The goal of the Teacher of Deafblind Pilot Project was to provide participating teachers and districts with increased knowledge, skills, and strategies for serving students with deafblindness. The project sought to raise awareness of the need for dedicated professionals to work with students with deafblindness at the state and local levels. It also presented a structured approach for providing technical assistance to districts and helped identify the role of highly qualified teachers of deafblindness (TDB's) in the IEP process. Most importantly, the project provided a model for how to provide quality support for students and their families.

People asked questions about why the role of the teacher of the deafblind is so important. Here are some common questions addressed by the Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project.

**Isn't a TVI or TDHH who has had special training already highly qualified?**

**Why are you recommending college coursework or a package of training for a TDB?**

Deafblindness is a complex disability. A body of practice and research has identified specific instructional strategies for this population. To serve these students, professionals need training in a scope and sequence based on a standard set of core competencies, such as the ones that have been validated by the Council for Exceptional Children (Initial Special Education Deafblind Specialty Set, 2010).

**I have an intervener, why do I need a teacher of the deafblind?**

There is no coursework on instructional design, or best teaching practices, for interveners. Legally, teachers are responsible for assessment, IEP development and student progress.

**Money is tight. How are schools going to be able to afford to hire ANOTHER teacher?**

We are not adding another person. The teachers of the deafblind would already be part of the IEP committee. We are attaching teacher of the deafblind (TDB) licensure to teachers who are already certified as a TDHH or a TVI.

### **Specific Information About the Technical Assistance Provided in the Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project**

The Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project was based on a three-year technical assistance program serving local districts in the Houston area. The pilot was a joint partnership between the TSBVI Outreach Deafblind Project and Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC). It provided an opportunity for teachers and administrators to participate in a training project supporting new models for teachers



of students with deafblindness (TDB). A second pilot project is using a two year time frame for this project.

### **The Workshop Model**

Through a process of needs assessment, onsite visits, and participant feedback, the Texas Deafblind Project discovered that a large group workshop model was not always effective in bringing about change for students with deafblindness. Although large group trainings were well attended and participant response was very positive, there was a breakdown between what participants learned in the workshops and their application of the strategies, techniques, and concepts that were presented. The gap between learning and practice in relation to programming for students with deafblindness was quite large.

Another challenge was the lack of an identified “community” of teachers of students with deafblindness who had an understanding of their role and its importance as a distinct profession. To address these challenges, the Pilot Project was designed around a series of group workshop days, followed immediately by one-to-one onsite visits. During the onsite visits, teachers were able to apply and practice ideas and concepts from the workshop, with support from members of the Pilot Project. For example, after a workshop on deafblind communication, interaction strategies learned during the workshop (hand under hand communication, calendar construction, and routine building) were used directly with case study students. The workshop also helped create a sense of group cohesion by regularly discussing the role of the teacher of the deafblind. Each of the participating teachers developed deeper knowledge and skills and were then able to practice them with their students.

Over the three-year cycle of the pilot, a total of nine group workshops were presented. Topics for the workshops were based on a combination of the predetermined “Roles of the TDB”, group needs

assessment, and the CEC TDB competencies, the set of “specialized knowledge and skills that professionals must master to educate individuals with exceptionalities” (Initial Special Education Deafblind Specialty Set, 2010).

### **Sample Training Sequence and Menu for TDB Program**

1. Intro - What is a Teacher of Students with Deafblindness (TDB)?
  - Program overview – contract, expectations, and outcomes
  - Why do we need the TDB?
  - Roles of the TDB – It’s more than Part C and FVLMA
  - The national, state and local scene – building capacity
  - TSBVI deafblind classroom observations
2. The Role of the TDB on the IEP team
  - The FIE process
  - Deafness/Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Deafblindness - definitions
  - Special Factors
  - Appropriate assessment
  - What does a quality “deafblind” IEP look like?
  - Positive teaming strategies
  - How to be a coach
  - Working with the intervener
  - What is the DB Child Count?
3. Deafblind Strategies
  - Tactile communication strategies
  - Interaction and bonding
  - Assessing communication systems – calendar systems

- Developing functional routines
  - Developing meaningful IEP's that address deafblindness
4. Functional hearing, vision, and functional communication assessment for students with deafblindness
- Developing functional routines that promote the development of listening skills in DB children
  - Assessment issuers and strategies for beginning, developing, and advanced deafblind communication
  - What does the FVLMA look like for a student with deafblindness?

## Options Menu

1. Helping Students with Deafblindness and Challenging Behaviors
  - Understanding sensory impairments and the effects
  - Preventing problems is better than reacting
  - Analyzing the function of behavior
  - Behavior as communication
2. Parents as an Integral Part of the Team
  - Transition to adult life
  - A parent's journey (guest parent presenter)
  - Understanding stress
  - Community resources – who are they?
  - State agencies – who are they and what do they do?
3. The Impact of Etiology and Complex Sensory Issues on Deafblind Programming

- Considerations when designing a BIP
- 10 Issues to Always Consider When Intervening for Students with deafblindness
- DB Etiology

During workshop meetings, administrators often formed a separate group in order to focus on *systems change*, looking at topics on a larger, district level. The remaining group of participants focused on topics of *student* and *teacher change*.

## Make-up of the teams

The mentor group consisted of three deafblind education specialists, the project director from the Texas Deafblind Project, and two deafblind program specialists from Region 4 ESC in Houston. The group provided one-to-one mentorship to the TDB's and their teams, coordinated the workshop training sessions, and met with administrators from participating districts. For the one-to-one onsite visits, TDB's were paired with one of the participating mentors from either the Texas Deafblind Project or from the local Education Service Center.

## Outcomes

The Deafblind Pilot Project endeavored to determine appropriate ways to measure the effectiveness and success of their efforts. They established three central measures of change: *student change*, *teacher (TDB) change*, and *systems change*. Technical assistance was directly tied to these measures and was provided throughout the three-year cycle of the pilot.

## **Student Change**

Ten students were used as case studies during the pilot. Base-line information showed that most of them were not receiving consistent programming specific to deafblindness at the beginning of the pilot. By the third year, however, nearly all of the students had IEP's created specific to their needs and appropriate classroom programming — deafblind communication strategies, assessments specific to deafblindness, and modifications and accommodations specific to their individual sensory needs.

A number of assessment tools were used during the pilot. These included: *The Communication Matrix* (Rowland, 2009), *The Infused Skills Assessment* (Hagood & Hauser), *The ADAMLS* (Blaha & Carlson, 2007), and the *Sensory Learning Kit* (Smith, 2005). *IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness*, from TSBVI, guided the development of IEP's specific to deafblindness, and objectives were designed to provide students with opportunities to build concepts, skills, and independence within the structure of functional routines.

The pilot group also developed student portfolios so that enduring and ongoing information could be gathered and tracked on each student. Along with IEP documentation, the portfolios included videos and pictures of the students' specific signs and gestures, calendar keys for set-up and design of student calendars, routine sheets that listed the steps of known routines, and modifications, accommodations, objectives, and language specific to each routine. Some portfolios also included information regarding outside service agencies, Personal Futures Planning, meeting notes, etc.

## **Teacher of the Deafblind Change**

Seven teachers were originally enrolled in the pilot project. All had either an endorsement in auditory impairments or visual impairments, or both. The teachers had varying experience working with students with deafblindness. Benchmarks for change were based on the Roles of the Teacher of Students with Deafblindness (TX Deafblind Project, 2013) and the CEC set of teacher skills and competencies (Initial Special Education Deafblind Specialty Set, 2010). Tools used to measure progress included video logs, teacher action plans, and teacher/student portfolios.

In the beginning, it was important for the pilot to identify teachers who had demonstrated an interest in deafblindness. Many of the pilot teachers had worked with members of the deafblind team of the TSBVI Outreach Deafblind Project through onsite consultations, workshops, or family events. It was hoped that because of their demonstrated interest they would continue to pursue coursework in deafblindness and help further the development of a deafblind community of practice.

## **Systems Change**

To measure systems change, the group examined increased efficiency in deafblind child count reporting, school programming change as noted by increased use of appropriate and specific deafblind strategies, establishment of collaborative teaming strategies, collaboration with outside agencies, and better satisfaction for families and educational professionals in the IEP/FIE processes.

After the completion of the first Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project, the TSBVI Outreach Deafblind Project team expanded the program,

and they are now near the end of the first year of a new two-year Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project. They are partnering with different school districts and working with a new cohort of teachers to help test the model and apply the information learned during the initial pilot which concluded in 2014. Some of the changes for the second Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project include:

- The project will continue for two years instead of three. A three-year commitment of time and resources was deemed too long for both the Deafblind Project and the partnering districts.
- The new pilot will be conducted on a smaller scale – it includes three TDB's, their sensory teams, and students from two local districts.
- They will establish “sensory” teams from the beginning – i.e. identify the counterpart to the TDB (TVI/TDHH), and include the special education teacher, COMS, and parents, as appropriate.
- They will use the documents and protocols developed during the first pilot: Roles of the Teacher of Students with Deafblindness, TDHH/TVI/SPED Job Comparison, student assessment protocols, and teacher/district needs assessments.

## Conclusion

In Texas, students with deafblindness must be served by both a TVI and TDHH. A separate (3rd) sensory licensure for TDB could mean that districts would need to hire an additional person for students with deafblindness. Instead, the Teacher of the Deafblind Pilot Project suggests attaching additional certification in sensory impairments to ones that already exist (i.e. TVI or TDHH).

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# The Low Vision Conference: A new event on the TSBVI Outreach calendar

Submitted by Cindy Bachofer, PhD, CLVT

***Abstract:** The author discusses the importance of addressing the needs of students with low vision, a description of the upcoming low vision conference.*

Keywords: low vision, academic students

How much of your college coursework focused on students with low vision? We are far more likely to have students with low vision who rely on print for reading and use their eyes to manage school and travel tasks on our caseloads than students who are blind. But how much disability-specific training did we receive in our training program to complete thorough assessments and plan for instruction? How does the student's particular eye condition and use of vision individualize my next lesson? The Low Vision Conference can help to fill in those gaps. In fact, the title of our first conference offered in May 2015 in Austin at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) Outreach Conference Center was **Filling in the Gaps: Meeting the Needs of Academic Students with Low Vision**. This article describes different models of the Low Vision Conference to date and highlights within these programs.

Being a teacher of students with visual impairments can often feel like detective work—and more so for those students with low vision who often strive to pass as typically sighted like their peers or can't ask about visual information they are missing if they don't know they are

missing it (e.g., expiration date on a food package, address numbers on a street sign). The Low Vision Conference can help to beef up your detective skills! Members from the Outreach team met in the fall of 2014 to plan the first conference that took place on May 15, 2015. The planning group, comprised of Cindy Bachofer, Chris Tabb, Eva Lavigne, Cyral Miller, Kate Hurst, and Chrissy Cowan, recognized that rather than considering the whole range of functional levels within one conference, they would structure the conference each year around a distinct theme or functional level. A second goal was to develop interactive sessions that kept attendees energized by the content and perspectives presented.

## **Filling in the Gaps: Meeting the Needs of Academic Students with Low Vision**

"He's passing his classes so I don't see him very often" or "She says she can see all of her class material when I check in so I think she's doing well" are comments that spotlight the detective work needed. The great majority of students with low vision read print, travel without a cane, and generally receive passing grades. These facts often place them on a consult level of service or very limited service time (e.g., 30 mins/12 weeks). The opening session used a panel format that was titled **It's My Life:**



Perspectives on Growing Up with Low Vision. The panelists shared direct and honest statements-in a respectful way-as they reflected on the amount and range of vision services they did or didn't receive. One panelist noted, "If you haven't developed any relationship with me, I'm not going to open up to you, and I'm certainly not going to use the optical devices you gave me." This set the tone for a day filled with thoughtful, inspiring, and sometimes uncomfortable views of services for academic students with low vision.

Another highlight of this first conference was the session titled ECC Walk-about. One planner humorously coined this as "speed dating with the ECC"-try 'em all in a fast-paced 90 minutes! Eight stations set up around a large room focused on each area of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) (excluding compensatory which was emphasized in an afternoon session). A facilitator at each station had prepared a student scenario, a lesson featuring the ECC area, and materials used in the lesson that guided the discussion. Groups of approximately 8 people moved from station to station. Ding! The bell rang signaling it's time to move to your next station. A note-taker at each station captured the information shared at the table in a Walk-about document (lesson ideas, materials, resources). These documents were placed in a Dropbox folder that attendees had access to following the conference. So, 8 stations x 8 dating slots = 64 terrific ECC brainstorming sessions to fill in that blank line-"What's my next lesson with my student with low vision?" The afternoon included two sessions on these topics: "What We Mean by Compensatory Skills—Accessing the General Curriculum" (Chrissy Cowan), and "Specially Designed Instruction for Academic Students with Low

Vision" (Dr. Kitra Gray). We closed the day with a panel of adults with low vision, who shared their views on what it takes to function in the world of competitive employment, and what skills they think need to be covered by educators to prepare students for this.

### **Increasing Low Vision Skills for Students at the Practical Academic Area**

It's Year Two for the Low Vision Conference and this year's theme is students with low vision in practical academic programs. This conference will also take place in Austin at the TSBVI Outreach Conference Center on Friday, May 20. The committee defined this group of students as those functioning 2-3 grades below grade level. This model will include a revised version of the ECC Walk-about and a panel session featuring parents and VI professionals. As planning continued, committee members noted that other needs in lesson preparation often claimed attention over developing visual skills to access near and distance information. The additional disabilities present in this group required additional planning time to ensure that potential reliance on vision, both with and without tools or optical devices, was recognized as a priority in the student's annual goals and objectives. Observation of the student in a range of settings is a key element to customizing instruction and one of the sessions in the May 2016 conference will highlight this critical piece of detective work.

### **Low Vision Conference on the Road**

Let's take it on the road! We had tested the model in-house so to speak and when a request came from Region 8 Education Service Center (ESC 8) to pack our bags and bring it to northeast Texas, we were excited. The new conference model was a success and the unmet

needs of the student with low vision had captured attention. We set the date for January 22 in Pittsburg, Texas, and began planning with co-sponsors Region 8 ESC, Region 10 ESC, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Stephen F. Austin State University, and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)-Division of Blind Services.

ESC 8 had recently moved into new spacious quarters and this gave us large meeting space for re-staging panel sessions, the ECC walk-about, and presenter sessions. Putting on a conference is definitely a team effort and our planning meetings focused on identifying vision professionals in Northeast Texas to support the same schedule of sessions. Along with TVIs and COMS, attendees included students from the SFA University program and several of these young adults with low vision were also panel members. Again, the ECC Walk-about needed facilitators for 8 areas of the ECC in 8 time slots over the 90-minute session. Note-takers recorded the brainstorming and attendees had access to a valuable bank of lesson ideas, materials suggestions, and resources. Success!

Let's take it on the road... to El Paso. This third conference focusing on academic students with low vision is a collaborative effort with regions 18 and 19, TSBVI Outreach, and DARS-Division of Blind Services. The event is scheduled to take place on Friday, September 30, 2016. Registration will be available later this spring.

## **Summary**

In the fall of 2014, we envisioned a low vision conference. Goal 1: Raise awareness of the unmet needs of students with low vision; Goal 2: Make it high energy. Attendees of past conferences have provided very positive feedback on the structure and content of each low vision conference. The planning meetings themselves have been engaging and lively conversations as Outreach staff members appreciate different perceptions of planning lessons, instructional environments, and vision professionals' needs for providing direct service to the range of students with low vision. What's your next lesson?

# A Research Study of the Genetic Causes of Visual Impairment

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

*Abstract: In this article Superintendent Daugherty shares information about researchers from Baylor studying genetic causes of visual impairment in students at TSBVI.*

Key Words: TSBVI, visually impaired, genetic eye disorders

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) is collaborating with two researchers at the Baylor College of Medicine who are studying the genetic basis for certain types of visual impairment. Ophthalmologist Dr. Richard Lewis and Richard Gibbs, Ph.D. of the BCM Human Genome Sequencing Center will begin their two year study with students enrolled at TSBVI. All students and their parents volunteering to participate in the program will provide blood samples for later analysis at the Baylor Genome Sequencing Center.

Among the types of visual impairment conditions the researchers are particularly interested in are nystagmus, retinal agenesis, aniridia, microphthalmia, anophthalmia, coloboma, rod-cone dystrophy, CVI, Leber Congenital Amaurosis, optic nerve atrophy, optic nerve hypoplasia, retinoblastoma, retinitis pigmentosa, retinoschisis, septo-optic dysplasia, retinopathy of prematurity and sclerocornea. The researchers will not be looking at visual impairments caused by trauma or other environmental factors.

The researchers state that their long term goals are to “confirm a genetic diagnosis in visually impaired individuals with a single gene diagnosis, to identify the causal gene in disorders that seem to be one disease but have several potentially causative genes with the same outcome, to discover new genes for disorders that have several known causes but for which not all of the genes are yet identified, to discover causative genes for genetic conditions that have no known gene, and to understand the gene-gene interactions where two or more genes may modify or enhance the disorder.”

Much of the work on this project will be in the 2016-17 school year among students enrolled full time at TSBVI, but we also anticipate that students in short term and summer programs will have an opportunity to participate. If we decide to open up the study to students and families across Texas, we'll post that prominently on the TSBVI website [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu). Anyone wanting to discuss the project or express an interest in participating is welcome to contact me at [billdaugherty@tsbvi.edu](mailto:billdaugherty@tsbvi.edu).

# The Deafblind Community Program (DBCP)

Scott Bowman, Interim Assistant Commissioner, Division for Blind Services,  
Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

*Abstract: Interim Assistant Commissioner Bowman shares a success story of a consumer who, with the support of the Deafblind Community Program, was able to learn, practice and master independent living skills.*

Key words: deafblind, independence, Deafblind Community Program, self-determination

Parents, professionals and students often question what life will be like after high school for young adults who are deafblind. How does a young adult successfully move (cut the strings) from the support of family and the education system to the world of work and independent life? For young adults who have both a vision and hearing loss, are eighteen years or older and are committed to work, the Deafblind Community Program (DBCP) offers a training program in Austin, Texas. It is geared to assist in building confidence and skill development to meet those challenges of getting a job and developing independence. Training focuses on the “Big Six” areas of Adjustment to Deafblindness, Independent Living, Travel, Communication, Support Systems and Vocational Skills; and is designed to meet the individual’s communication requirements by knowledgeable staff.

Elaine Sveen, Manager, Deafblind Services, shared the following story of one consumer that demonstrates how DBCP services can assist individuals who are deafblind. Jessy Dussetchleger started the training program this past April at the age of 21. He was born deaf

and is legally blind. With the aid of a cochlear implant and American Sign Language (ASL), he can communicate with speech in quiet environments and uses ASL in noisy environments. Jessy was not ready to move into an apartment when he started the program, but he took full advantage of the training programs available to learn to live independently and prepare to get his first job.

After six months of training, Jessy started to cut the strings from his family he loves through a four day experience living by himself in a studio hotel room equipped with a full kitchen. The DBCP training prepared him for this experience through a series of real life classes such as learning to:

- open a checking account and manage his own finances
- use a first aid kit
- know what to do in an emergency and how to call 911
- travel by bus to the local HEB food store and shop for meals
- develop a checklist of items to bring for his hotel stay

Once Jessy, his parents, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Deafblind

Services staff members agreed he was ready, the hotel was booked and the journey was about to begin. Jessy was a bit scared at the thought of being on his own, but held to his commitment to show he was capable of living by himself. In November, Jessy arrived at the hotel with everything that he needed.

Jessy utilized his skills in problem solving, time management and his self-determination to:

- check in and pay for the hotel
- arrange his transportation
- ride the bus to HEB and navigate grocery shopping
- cross a major intersection
- set up his Silent Call door pager and his wake up alarm
- cook his meals
- entertain himself

The next day, he chose to sleep most of the day. In the evening, he successfully prepared dinner and served his parents. That night, he set his own Silent Call alarm clock to wake him up on time so he would be ready for his driver to pick him up to attend training at the DBCP.

As individuals begin to cut strings to their families, young adults face challenges, with or without a disability. Jessy, too, experienced the temptation of staying up late, having no parents around to tell him to go to bed, and this resulted in him oversleeping the next morning. He kept his driver waiting and he arrived late to training. Jessy said in his own words, “I need to go to bed early when I have an early appointment the next day.”

Later, during a debriefing with Jessy where he talked about his experience living alone in a hotel studio, he said it was a good experience and he now knows he can live alone but he prefers to have a roommate. “A roommate will help me not to be bored or get lonely.” At the end of our discussion, he added with a smile, “But it is important to never give up and to always have hope!”

Jessy’s journey is continuing as he works on landing a job. He is preparing his resume, learning more about how to organize his information and actively talking with employers. With several applications submitted, his DBS team and family are confident that work is in his future. Jessy is striving to reach his vocational goal. One of the key elements of his vocational program is that the DBCP program staff know how to interact with Jessy.

Are you interested in knowing more about interacting with people who are deafblind? The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services is pleased to announce the release of its newest brochure: Resources for Interacting with People who are Deafblind. This 18-page, full color brochure presents the diverse nature of what it means to have both hearing and vision loss, provides communication options and strategies to interact. Resources are listed to obtain more information on deafblindness. The brochure is printed both in English and Spanish and available in accessible formats. Our new brochure offers insight into the variety of ways to interact with people who are deafblind. When in doubt, ask the individual, “Proper interaction can ensure that the independence and abilities of people who are deafblind are respected.” For a free copy of this brochure, you can contact the DARS Deafblind Services at: 512-416-5450 or [deafblindservices@dars.state.tx.us](mailto:deafblindservices@dars.state.tx.us)



# “i for Empathy” Gesture and Empathy Button Campaigns

Doug McLean

Father of Daniel, an 8 year old with CHARGE Syndrome who has deafblindness and autism

*Abstract: A father of a boy with deafblindness introduces a new sign for empathy.*

Keywords: deafblind, CHARGE syndrome, sign, gesture

What is the “i Is for Empathy” gesture? Start with one hand clenched in a fist, extend the “pinky” (small) finger...this is the letter “i” symbol in American Sign Language.

To express empathy: Hold the fist with pinky extended over your heart as you look at the person you empathize with. Optionally, also then extend your hand and point at them with your pinky/small finger.

To receive empathy or assistance: Hold the fist with pinky extended straight up over your head (as you might hold your hand up in class, but with only pinky extended).

## WHY “i for Empathy”?

Empathy has to start with the individual, either as “I Empathize” with you, or “I need Empathy/Assistance”. Empathy must be felt by the “i” in all of us to either give or receive it.

## Why this Gesture? Do we need it?

The inspiration was my son, Daniel, who is deafblind with autism...he is non-verbal and I wanted to develop a way for him to express if he needs help or assistance. He doesn’t speak and

can only sign some very basic ASL signs. I imagined him lost or confused without his family around...who will understand his need for help??? If we have a widely recognized simple gesture that is understood...the rest of us can benefit.



*Photo of right fist with pinky finger extended.*

## Example of “i Express Empathy”

You see someone is struggling, or having a bad day. You smile and show them the “i for Empathy” sign over your heart. This indicates that you empathize with them, their struggle is yours, you are a friend, you would be willing to assist if they need it. You’ve shared Empathy.

## Example of “i Need Empathy/Assistance”

In concerts, people are clustered together in large groups, with the inability to move easily and due to

loud noise, are effectively deaf for that time. In an emergency, such as if someone passed out and was needing medical help in the middle of a large crowd, it takes valuable time to get the attention of Staff/Security...waving hands, shouting, yelling don't work. If the people around the emergency held up their collective hands with the "i for Empathy" gesture...a visible sign that multiple people think there is a need for Empathy/Assistance there...security could recognize an area in the crowd that needs attention quickly. A Person in Need has received the Empathy and Assistance they needed.

This gesture is not an American Sign Language sign, it is an invention and an attempt to cross over the boundaries between the hearing and deaf communities and generate a new common sign and gesture widely recognized by general society.

### **Who can use this gesture, and how?**

Autistic/non-verbal individuals can be taught. Lost in New York? Need Directions? Raise the "i for Empathy" hand and let people come help you. Someone struggling? Want to see if you can help? "I for Empathy" over your heart shows you care and could help if they want it. Many other uses will be created in various situations.

### **What Is the empathy button?**

Social Media is ubiquitous and often expresses emotions. An Empathy Button Icon can share this emotion. The "i for Empathy" gesture can easily be expressed by a iconic representation and can be SHARED easily to show support/Empathy for the individual. We hope that Facebook, Buzzfeed, Twitter, etc., utilize the Empathy Button to convey this sentiment...and by doing so will also promote the gesture into our everyday lives.

## **Take Action: The Alice Cogswell Anne Sullivan Macy Act**

Excerpts from AFB website: <http://www.afb.org/info/get-connected/take-action/12>

*Abstract: This article discusses the important changes the Cogswell-Macy Act will have on the education of students who are deafblind, visually impaired and hard of hearing. The article provides suggestion on how you can get involve to make this a reality including talking points.*

Key Words: IDEA, Special Education, Deafblind, blind, visually impaired, deaf and hard of hearing, Cogswell – Macy Act

### **The Cogswell-Macy Act Will**

- Ensure specialized instruction specifically for students who are visually impaired, deafblind, or deaf or hard of hearing.
- Increase the availability of services and resources by ensuring all students who are

deaf or hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind are accounted for.

- Enhance accountability at the state and federal levels.
- Increase research into best practices for teaching and evaluating students with visual impairments by establishing the Anne Sullivan Macy Center on Visual Disability and Educational Excellence—a collaborative consortium of nonprofits, higher education institutions, and other agencies to provide technical support, research assistance, and professional development.

### **Why We Need the Cogswell-Macy Act**

Today's schools are not prepared to help children who are deafblind, deaf or hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired develop to their full potential. To ensure that these students receive the education they deserve, the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (H.R. 3535) was introduced in Congress in September 2015.

The Cogswell-Macy Act is the most comprehensive special education legislation for students with sensory disabilities to date. This act seeks to expand the resources available to these students, and their parents and educators, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

<http://www.familyconnect.org/info/education/know-your-rights/idea-what-parents-need-to-know/235>.

### **An Even Better IDEA**

Originally enacted by Congress in 1975, and most recently reauthorized in 2004, IDEA ensures that children with disabilities receive

educational opportunities in the public school system at no additional cost to parents.

IDEA is expected to come up for reauthorization soon, giving us an opportunity to strengthen current law. While IDEA has been successful at mainstreaming students with disabilities in America's public schools, the law must be significantly enhanced so that students who are deaf or hard of hearing, deafblind, blind, or visually impaired can receive the public education that meets their unique learning needs and maximizes their potential. If enacted, the Cogswell-Macy Act will vastly improve educational and lifelong employment and independence outcomes for these students.

### **Toward Improved Education for All Students**

Named for the first deaf student to be formally educated in the U.S. and for Helen Keller's beloved teacher, respectively, the Cogswell-Macy Act will ensure that students who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired, or deaf or hard of hearing receive the expert instruction and services they need to succeed in school and beyond. Children who are blind or visually impaired need to study the same basic academic subjects that typical children do, but in order to master these subjects (often known as the "core curriculum") and complete their schoolwork, as well as to eventually live and work independently, children who are visually impaired usually need to learn an additional set of skills known as the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). The ECC incorporates skills needed by students with visual impairment: including communication and productivity (including braille instruction, and assistive technology proficiency inclusive of low vision devices where appropriate); self-sufficiency and

social interaction (including orientation and mobility, self determination, sensory efficiency, socialization, recreation and fitness, and independent living skills); and age-appropriate career education. Similarly, children who are deaf or hard of hearing have unique language and communication needs that, if left unaddressed, interfere with their educational performance and social interactions.

The Cogswell-Macy Act will ensure that all students who are blind or visually impaired receive the state-of-the-art services and skills provided by highly qualified teachers in core and expanded core curriculum areas. Likewise, it will ensure that students who are deafblind or deaf or hard of hearing are served by qualified personnel who can meet their unique learning needs.

The Cogswell-Macy Act will require states to identify, locate, and evaluate children who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or deafblind, regardless of whether they have additional disabilities. While it may seem surprising, children with sensory disabilities are not always identified properly, especially if they have additional disabilities. This means that these students may not have their learning needs fully evaluated, which impacts the resources that are allocated to addressing their needs. The Cogswell-Macy Act will require states to provide meaningful data about students who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired, or deaf or hard of hearing, regardless of whether they may have additional disabilities, which will expand knowledge about the quality of special education and related services they receive. Having such data will also allow for ongoing improvement of programs for students with sensory disabilities.

The Cogswell-Macy Act will enhance accountability at the state and federal levels. Under the Cogswell-Macy Act, states will be expected to conduct strategic planning—and commit to such planning in writing—to ensure all students receive the specialized instruction and services they require, provided by properly trained personnel. The Act will also increase the U.S. Department of Education’s responsibility to monitor and report on states’ compliance with their obligations. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education will provide regular and up-to-date written policy guidance to states to help them implement the law—putting the weight of federal support behind students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind, and their parents and educators.

Establish a national collaborative resource center: the Anne Sullivan Macy Center on Visual Disability and Educational Excellence. This resource center will support the ongoing professional development of instructors who work with students who are blind or visually impaired. In addition, it will foster research on teaching students with visual impairments, and encourage the development and dissemination of best practices for meeting these students’ needs.

### **Remember:**

### **We Need Your Help!**

**Read the complete text of H.R. 3535, the Cogswell-Macy Act**

<http://www.afb.org/info/get-connected/take-action/complete-text-of-macy-act/125>

At the above link is also listed: Cogswell-Macy Act Talking Points in English and Spanish, and What You Can Do to Help.

# Regional CVI Clinic: Coming to Your Neighborhood?

Sara Kitchen, TSBVI Educational Specialist, and Ann Rash, TSBVI Early Childhood Specialist

*Abstract: The authors describe a demonstration assessment clinic event for young children with cortical visual impairment.*

**Key Words:** cortical/cerebral visual impairment (CVI), blind, visually impaired, visual functioning, CVI Clinic, TSBVI, Educational Service Centers (ESC)

When children who have cortical or cerebral visual impairment (CVI) receive intervention at an early age, they not only progress quickly, but can get a head start on learning to use their vision to the best of their ability before they enter elementary school. The key to successful intervention is to start with a thorough assessment of the student's visual functioning, and identify intervention that is appropriate for that child at their current level of visual development. TSBVI Outreach and Diane Sheline paired for the second time in 2016 with a regional educational service center (ESC) to provide a CVI Assessment Clinic for young children. This clinic was conducted in Fort Worth, ESC Region 11. Vision teachers left the clinic with a completed CVI assessment report, including strategies, adaptations, and programming suggestions that provided support to their students' continued progress in using their vision. During this year's clinic, vision teachers were encouraged to identify goals for next year.

This clinic can also happen in your ESC regional area! We plan to continue with additional CVI Assessment clinics in regions throughout Texas. If you are a vision teacher, parent, or agency serving young children with visual impairment and are interested in this coming to your area, please talk to your local regional ESC VI consultant.

Teachers shared the following comments: "Excellent clinic, lots of useful information, could strongly relate to my caseload. Would like an extension clinic of a 'make and take' for materials to be used," and, "We are learning each time we do this process. Thank you for making this happen for Region 11 TVIs and their young students with CVI!"

The CVI Clinic was an intensive process for vision teachers, requiring a time commitment throughout the entire 2015-2016 school year. The process was divided into small, manageable steps. 19 Hours of continuing education credits were given. For the first step, vision teachers were asked to complete a parent interview. The parent interview conversation is integral in gathering information, as parents have a wealth of knowledge on their own child and how their vision has changed over time. This conversation functions to build awareness of CVI characteristics for the parent



and the TVI, giving them the base knowledge of CVI necessary to be able to apply information from the CVI clinic report. One parent shared, “I would most definitely recommend parents and students participating in the program [clinic]. For me, I always appreciate any time that I can be in a room full of individuals that know or want to better understand CVI. Even after almost 2 years, it can be an overwhelming diagnosis, so I love to get ideas and feedback.”

The second step for vision teachers was to gather observation videos. These videos were submitted to help facilitators become familiar with the children’s CVI characteristics that were evident within everyday activities, environments and with familiar objects.



*Photo of a baby looking at brightly colored toys.*

The first two steps were paired with hour-long conversations, via webinar, between facilitators

and TVIs to discuss and explore the details. Facilitators and TVIs then used approximately three hours to compile information from parent interviews and observation videos to complete those sections of Roman-Lantzy’s CVI Range, Rating 1. This process helped to plan the direct assessment, which took place in person the day of the CVI Clinic.

Student assessments were scheduled in two-hour increments with short breaks between evaluation sessions on the day of the CVI Clinic. The parents brought their children and the child’s familiar toys and snacks for their two-hour slot. The TVIs stayed all day to observe all students participating in the clinic. TVIs came for a half day the second day and worked on student specific reports with assistance from facilitators. Additional teachers of the visually impaired were given the opportunity to register as observers of any number of assessments on the day of the clinic, even though they did not have a student who was being assessed at that time, and were given continuing education credit accordingly.

Teachers and parents have reported a month later that they are using and/or planning to purchase items discussed in CVI reports that were written by the TVIs. Students are responding more consistently to visual stimuli and parents and teachers are putting into place recommended materials and interventions. From the ESC VI Specialist, Stephanie Walker: “The CVI Clinic was wonderful! Thank you for coming to ESC region 11. Thanks to all the teachers that participated.”

# Outreach Program Honors Texas Fellows Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters

The Texas Fellows program acknowledges the individual recruiters (Texas Fellow) and welcomes the new VI professional (Candidate) to the field. You are eligible to be a Texas Fellow if you were a significant person in the candidate's recruitment. Candidates must have started their training program, seeking their first certificate (TVI or O&M), after May 15, 2014.

Texas Fellows and Candidates receive additional recognition and incentives. For more information, and an application go to the following link: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/how-do-i-become-a-vi-professional>.

For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow or working as a VI professional contact Mary Shore at [shorem@tsbvi.edu](mailto:shorem@tsbvi.edu).

## **Texas Fellow**

Kandice Burke  
Shelly Gonzales  
Lonnie Fortner  
Tashia Ellington  
Deborah Thompson  
Janiel Hayes  
Charlotte Simpson  
Marcia Hopkins  
Cindy Warnick

## **Candidate**

Jennifer Gillispie  
Katie Nash  
Judy Martinez  
Heather Gill  
Kelly Bevis Woodiel  
Irma Garza  
Cindy Holifield  
Jennifer Brown  
Cassidy Sherwood

## In Memory of Dr. Phil Hatlen

Mary Ann Siller, M.Ed., National Consultant in Blindness and Low Vision Services

*Abstract: A brief description of Dr. Hatlen's career and work in the field of education of students with visual impairment*

Keywords: Phil Hatlen, Expanded Core Curriculum, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

It is with a heavy heart that we share with you that Dr. Phil Hatlen passed away. We have lost the presence of a talented, generous, loving friend. Yet his legacy will live on!

Phil has been honored many times with prestigious awards for his lifetime of achievement in the field of blindness. As you know, Phil was a consummate leader who authored articles and chapters in books that have enlightened us and brought new advancements in teaching children. He was a teacher of students with visual impairments, a leader of university teacher training programs to teach children who are blind or have low vision, a developer of system change steps to improve the educational system in America for children who are visually impaired, researcher to find new educational approaches, a friend with conviction to his mission in life, and a person who supported families in their quest to dream big.

I personally am reflecting upon the many years spent alongside him with building the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT) and with the creation of the National Agenda for the

Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including those with Multiple Disabilities and the subsequent numerous activities and projects we uplifted from its ten goals. He is known far and wide for his work with the creation of the National Agenda's Goal 8 ----the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Here are a few heartfelt quotes from today's exchange of emails from colleagues .....who admired Phil. "He is my ECC hero." "Words can't express my sorrow." "What a loss to our field, but it's so much better since he was in it." "OMG...this is sad news..but what a true leader he was." "He was dedicated to his work and was generous in sharing his expertise." "He was a giant in the field of blindness services whom I was proud and privileged to call a friend."

Phil was honored by being inducted in 2012 to the Hall of Fame -- Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field. This Hall of Fame is housed at American Printing House for the Blind (APH). You may read more about Phil's work and mission in life at <http://www.aph.org/hall/inductees/hatlen/>

In his own words, this is his message to the field:

*Stand tall, be proud of your profession.  
Decide what your "bottom line" is, and do not*

*compromise. Commit to your fundamental truths, and live your profession by not compromising. Be gentle, be creative, and respect the dignity of all children. Love life,*

*work hard, live with a passion for everything that you do. Laugh a lot, and help your students to learn to laugh.*

## A Celebration of Phil's Life Service- February 6, 2016

Rona Pogrund, Ph.D., Professor, Texas Tech University

*Abstract: Dr. Pogrund read this tribute to Phil Hatlen at his memorial service. She tells of her long-time friendship, professional collaboration, and deep admiration she has of him.*

Keywords: Phil Hatlen, AVIT, Expanded Core Curriculum, "the opportunity to be equal and the right to be different"

I wanted to start off today with words used to describe Phil Hatlen by those who knew him: gentle, kind, calm, dedicated, inspirational, compassionate, gifted, visionary, focused, brilliant, in tune with parents and students, sense of humor, honest, passionate, mentor, true friend, had a big heart, advocate, hero, teacher, articulate, encouraging, available, peaceful spirit, leader, humble, and one of a kind. A lot of people loved and admired Phil.

Phil was my mentor, my colleague, my "big brother," my fellow "warrior," and most importantly, my dear friend for over 35 years since I first met him in 1980 at a professional visual impairment conference in California. I remember vividly seeing him across the room, and being fairly new in the visual impairment field, wanting nothing more than to meet the esteemed and famous Phil Hatlen who was revered by so many in our field. From that

moment on, after hearing his kind voice and seeing that warm smile and twinkle in his eye, I knew we were of a kindred spirit. We worked tirelessly together in California advocating for the rights of people who were blind or visually impaired. We started the Joint Action Committee, the first coalition of blindness organizations joining together to advance causes that improved lives of those with visual impairment. We walked the halls of the Capitol in Sacramento and in Washington, D.C., trying to make a difference. And, as our friendship grew, we spent many late nights in California dreaming and scheming of how to make things better. Even though we lived at different ends of the state, we always stayed connected, sharing both work-related successes and personal and family life-cycle events. Through Phil, I got to know Toni and then Lucas, as our families shared good memories of the times we spent together in those early years. Phil was always watching out for me, so when I met my husband-to-be, Rich, Phil took him aside and wanted to make sure he would take good care

of me. He was my protector in many ways. That was the way Phil cared for his friends.

The irony that Phil moved to Austin in 1990, a year before we moved here, was more than a dream come true, and when I started working for Texas Tech University (Phil also played a role in me getting that faculty position and being able to stay in Austin by offering my dean free office space for me at TSBVI), even more wonderful was the fact that for several years up until the time Phil retired as Superintendent of TSBVI, my office was right down the hall from Phil. I could have never asked for more than to be able to see my wonderful friend and colleague on a regular basis. We continued being fellow warriors fighting for the rights of persons with visual impairments in Texas and helped with the formation of the Texas coalition, the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT). And our longtime friendship continued to grow.

Phil taught me many lessons through who he was and what he believed. His deep convictions for what he believed was right for children have led me to always want to do what is in the best interest of the students we serve rather than what is politically correct or most popular or most expedient at the time. Many times our convictions were not received well by others, but that never stopped us from moving ahead with persistence. But Phil also taught me to listen to what others had to contribute (even when we thought we were right!). He was really great at doing that if a good case was made, but on some things, Phil would not compromise, and that is what made him such a great leader and made him so effective in making changes and moving things forward in our field. Phil spoke often of his “fundamental truths” and his “personal convictions,” and he taught me to fight hard for what you believe are your

fundamental truths, but to be open to listening to others about those things that are your personal convictions. That is how Phil tried to live his life, particularly in more recent years as he grew older.

The significant impact that Phil had on the lives of those who are blind or visually impaired is immeasurable. His basic belief in the dignity and worth of every child was how he treated everyone he encountered. His words that people who are blind need the “opportunity to be equal and the right to be different” were what he always stood by. Phil often said how lucky he was that he loved going to work every day in all of his different jobs, as his passion for the many phases of his career showed. His many awards are a testament to his contributions to our field. There are so many things he made happen that people often take for granted or forget that it was Phil’s drive and effort that made the difference—from the Hatlen Center for the Blind transition program, his work for the Blind Babies Foundation, personnel preparation funds for the two Texas visual impairment University programs that continue to train teachers today, the Expanded Core Curriculum that guides services to children with visual impairments across the nation and world, to the bond funds for the reconstruction of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The list goes on and on—Phil’s contributions to the profession and field he loved are endless! So many of his colleagues and former students have shared the profound impact Phil has had on their lives, so the ripples of who Phil was will continue long after he is gone. I miss my dear friend and his warm hugs and am having trouble imagining life without him. May his memory continue to be a blessing to his family, whom he loved deeply, and to all who knew him and all who were touched by Phil’s time in this world.



# Fundamental Truths in the Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Excerpts from a Keynote speech by Phil Hatlen, AER Conference 2000

## Fundamental Truths

- All blind and visually impaired students have the capability for inclusion into society, at a time and to a degree that is appropriate for each individual, and is chosen by that individual.
  - Assessment, educational planning, and placement decisions must be driven by the individual needs of each student.
  - Every blind and visually impaired student must have the services of a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments and an orientation and mobility instructor for sufficient time to meet identified needs.
  - Parents and educators form a special, vital, and necessary partnership.
  - All blind and visually impaired persons must have the opportunity to be equal, and the right to be different.
- instructor can meet the needs of students if she/he has a caseload of over eight students.
  - I believe that we are a profession, with history, research, literature, methodologies, skills, and knowledge to justify the title of “profession”.
  - I believe that the expanded core curriculum is just as important for blind and visually impaired students as is academic curriculum.
  - I believe that it is possible for every human being to have a joyful, satisfying, and productive life.
  - I believe the zealot inclusionists are wrong.
  - I believe that the school for the blind should be the center of services for all blind and visually impaired students in a state.
  - I believe that heroic, high-risk efforts must be made to solve the 50-year-old teacher shortage crisis.

## Personal Convictions

- I believe that schools for the blind are essential in order to meet the individual needs of all students.
  - I believe that low vision students have needs that are just as intensive as blind students.
  - I believe that no teacher of students with visual impairments, and no orientation and mobility
- I believe that every child has a right to literacy.
  - I believe that blindness and visual impairment cause significant differences in the manner and style by which students learn. It is more than an inconvenience.
  - I believe that children with severe multiple disabilities are precious children, deserving of the very best that education has to offer.



## **Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

### **Outreach Programs**

[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) | 512-454-8631 | 1100 W. 45<sup>th</sup> St. | Austin, TX 78756



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