TX SenseAbilities

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

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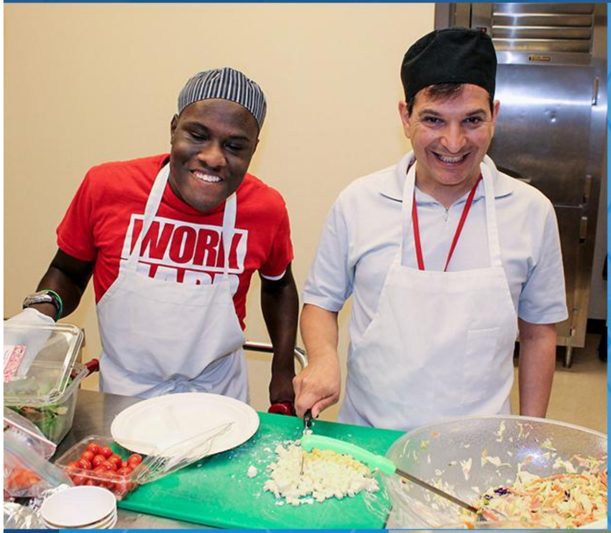
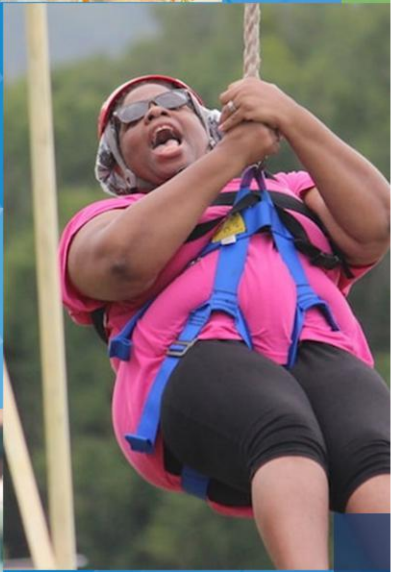
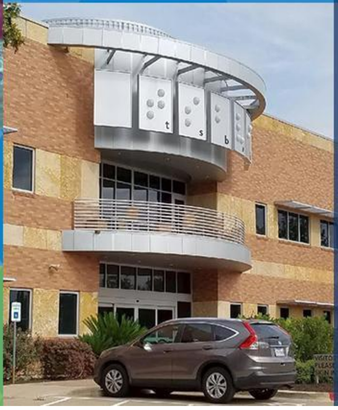






CONTENTS

TX SenseAbilities is a collaboration of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Texas Health and Human Services Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (BCVDDP).

Living Life Expansively as a Blind Person in America

George Stern, DeafBlind Citizens in Action Vice President, Lubbock

Abstract: The author highlights how it is the best of times and the worst of times to be a blind person living in America. He shares guiding principles for living a life that is not constricted by other people's expectations and how to be a change agent.

Keywords: Family Engagement, self-determination, technology, futures planning, blind, DeafBlind, disabilities rights, civic engagement

Introduction

Thanks to George Stern for allowing us to reprint his 2017 Commencement speech to the TSBVI Graduating Class of 2017. George Stern is a 26-year-old self-advocate residing in Lubbock, Texas. He's pursuing a major in French and a classics minor at Texas Tech University.

Photo of George Stern smiling.

George hopes to apply these studies to a career either in law or with the Library of Congress to help ensure access to the treasury of human knowledge for all people. George is president of the Texas Tech Judo and Brazilian Jiu-jitsu Club, vice president of DeafBlind Citizens in Action, a board member for the Collaboration in Assistive Technology for Students with Sensory Impairments Group through Texas Tech Sowell Center, and he is seriously one of the best cooks in the nation, apparently. George was born in Jamaica, a land of many wonderful things, but not of opportunity, and especially not for people who have disabilities. George left Jamaica when he was 2 years old after an initial misdiagnosis for pink eye was later revised to be bilateral retinal blastoma, a cancer beyond the capacity of his home country to treat. The operation to remove the cancer was successfully completed at the Eye Institute of Miami, Florida. The operation left George blind.

George's bilateral hearing loss, which doctors think stems from a chromosomal abnormality, did not manifest until he started pre-kindergarten. His life first as a blind, and now a DeafBlind, person has been guided by two tenets. First, do unto others as you would be done unto. Second (and this comes from his father), labor for learning before you grow old, for learning is better than silver or gold. Silver and gold will vanish away, but a good education will never decay. Learning is George's passion, and consequently, language has become his preoccupation. "I speak, therefore, others know that I am" is an idea at the center of George's drive for fluency in as many languages and modalities as possible, both for himself and for others. I'm very proud to introduce to you: George Stern.

Speech

Thank you for that wonderful introduction. I am very honored that you at TSBVI and that everyone here has invited me to be a part of your graduation celebration. (Aside to guide dog, who is lying down) Fine, you can go to sleep while I talk. I don't care. (To the audience) He is not the most dedicated audience. But as I was saying, I am honored that you have all invited me here to be a part of your celebration. And it is a milestone. I remember long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away, when I was graduating. And it was a momentous experience, a momentous time.

It is, as they say, a beginning, a commencement. And I've looked at different commencement speeches. And I know they tell you all kinds of wonderful things, like follow your dreams, follow your passion, find what you're passionate about. So, I'm not going to go down that route. I'm going to talk about some other things.

Let's start with some Charles Dickens. It was the best of times and the worst of times. You guys know that one? Well, let's make it more personal. It is the best of times to be a blind person in America. And it is the worst of times to be a blind person in America. Let's start with the good news — the gospel, as they would say. It's the best of times because technology and expectations, and the economy, and the private sector, and the public sector have all combined in the realization that blindness and that disability in general is not the end of the world. Am I right about that?

We've gone from a century in which people with disabilities were literally warehoused, were not thought to be educable, were even left to die. We've come from that to a place where the major technology companies of this era — Facebook, Google, Twitter — have taken accessibility and put those at the center of their market. They care about us. They decided that we, as people with disabilities, as blind people, are as much valued customers as anyone else. Think about this. I remember when the Facebook artificial intelligence that describes photos first came out. Anyone remember that, any people on Facebook here? So I remember when that first came out. And it was interesting. I would have voiceover read to me the captions. And it would say something like, "Three people. Photo." And I was like, "Yeah. I know it's a photo. Can you tell me more?" And now within the space of just a few months, Facebook is telling me, "Shoes, four people, smiling, glasses, wedding, basketball court." I'm like, "Whoa! Where are we going?" Are we going to get to a point where it says, two people, one has a pimple on his nose? A bit too much information.

So, it is the best of times. Technology that makes education accessible, that makes books accessible, expanding rapidly. We now have more companies working on different solutions for different problems than we've ever had before. We have people working on the idea of a more affordable and more portable version of refreshable braille that people can carry around without spending however much the new Apex costs, $6,000, $5,000. All of that is an expansion, is an improvement.

Yet, it is the worst of times. Why? I saw very recently (I think maybe three months ago) in the New York Times health section an article that was titled, "What's the Worst Thing That Could Possibly Happen?" Guess what their answer was? Blindness. I looked at that and I was like, "Are you kidding me?" We have AIs, artificial intelligences, that will soon be giving us way too much information. And you're telling me that blindness is the worst thing that could happen?

According to most Americans, yes. And what this demonstrates to me is that for every action — and in this case we have a positive action — there is an equal and opposite reaction. So even as the reality improves, as the reality gets better and our expectations as students and parents and staff, even as our expectations expand, we find that society's expectations may be constricting. And this is not, maybe, something you want to hear at a commencement address, but I will tell you the truth.

Employment, the employment picture for us as blind students, blind people, is bleak. Not because we can't do it, not because we don't have the tools, or the drive, or the imagination, or the will. But because society's expectations, for some reason, continue to exist connected to a reality of two centuries ago. They constrict while our expectations for ourselves are expanding. I recently saw some news about federal legislation that might be getting passed soon that restricts the extent to which companies have to make accommodations. There is other legislation in the field of education that might restrict the extent to which schools have to make accommodations for students with disabilities. So in that sense, it is the worst of times. Each one of you here, whether you are staff, whether you are a parent, whether you are a teacher, whether you are a student, you will have to fight these changes.

You will have to fight these constricting expectations. I'm not going to tell you how to fight them. That's your choice. Each of us has to pick our own battles and pick our style of fighting. But I would like to give you some basic principles that I have found helpful in just trying to live my life according to the expectations that I have and trying to live my life expansively rather than according to the closed expectations that constrict us.

Only Make Promises You Can Keep and Keep the Promises You Make

The first one I would like to give you: Only make promises you can keep and keep the promises you make. I don't know if this might be an old-fashioned idea. I'm very old, 26. Old-fashioned idea. But I think the idea of a promise has lost some of its binding quality. That may be the politicians' fault. It may be that we as citizens, as people, as investors or consumers, hold people in charge less to their promises. That may be. But I urge you, don't make promises you can't keep, because there's nothing that scatters more negativity through the human condition, that hurts people more, that ruins lives more than broken promises. Whether that be a promise that says 'til death do us part, or it be something simpler like that time you promised your kid ice cream and didn't give it to him. Broken promises radiate pain, radiate loss of trust, radiate a destruction of confidence, betrayal — all these negative things that echo through the ages forever and ever. I'll come back to this, but people remember broken promises. It's a pain that doesn't go away. So that's the first thing I urge you: Keep the promises you make. Know what you have control over so that you can make a promise and know that, to the best of your ability, you will be able to keep it. Be judicious in your promise-making.

Do More than You Say

The second thing: Do more than you say. This is difficult for me, because I'm a talker. I like to talk. I like the sound of my voice. So do you, I know. So, do more than you say. Words are cheap. They're very cheap. They only cost air. Action, now, you've heard this, actions speak louder than words. But not only do they speak louder than words, they mean more. So, do not be so quick to say what your plans are, say what your intentions are, say what you want to be, where you want to go. Do it. It was the name of an award I received in middle school: Just Do It. Don't say it; just do it.

Commit to Being Good

The last thing I want to leave you with is another urging I have for you, a charge for all of us: Commit to being good. I'm going to stick on that first word; it's apparently something we millennials are afraid to do: commit. We're afraid of commitment. No marriage, too much commitment there. No! But I'm urging you, if you commit to nothing else, if you take a while to decide what's your dream job, what career you want to commit to, if you take a while to decide which relationship you want to commit to, if you take a while to commit to anything else, simply commit to being good.

Being good is currently underrated in this society. Everyone's like, yeah, I want to be rich. OK, fine. Yeah, I want to be powerful. OK, fine. I want to be right. That's fine; be right, I don't care. But being good, what does this mean? Does this mean, you know, following some specific doctrine? Not particularly, not for me. When I say being good, I mean it's as simple as waking up in the morning, seeing that it's somebody's birthday, and wishing them happy birthday. That's what I mean by being good. Why am I stressing this? I'm going to go back to what I said earlier when we were talking about broken promises. Think about the negative emotions in the world: hate, anger, guilt. Those things last. They don't need maintenance. Nobody ever needs to reinvent tragedy. It's comedy that needs reinvention. Why? Because laughter, joy, goodness, kindness need constant reinforcement. They need constant vigilance, constant renewal.

Negative things: You remember those things forever. I mean, if you think of it in terms of Star Wars, Darth Vader, the Emperor, their actions; the billions that were killed in that fictional universe, had the most long-lasting impact. Whereas every time the Jedi came along to save the day, it seems they needed to save the day again, and again, and again. Why? Because that's the nature of good. Good never finishes. There's never a time when enough good has been done. So, commit to it. We have to commit to being good every single day; at every opportunity the choice is offered, be good, or be bad and feed the negative emotions that are ripping this world apart already. I'm urging you, I'm asking all of you here, wherever you're going from this graduation point, wherever this commencement, this beginning, takes you, commit to be good in the small and in the big.

The last thought I will leave you with is this: The best argument for a successful today is a successful yesterday. The best incentive for a successful tomorrow is a successful today. And with that, congratulations to all of you. May the force be with you.

Supports in Adult Life: One Family's Solution

Lynne McAlister and Rachel Simpson, TSBVI VI Outreach

Abstract: This article discusses two types of supports that can be utilized in adult life: Customized Employment and Supported Decision Making. Supported Decision Making relates to independent living, whereas Customized Employment is an employment process.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind/visually impaired, customized employment, supported decision making, adult life

For people who have ongoing support needs, transition from school to adult life can be complex and confusing. This article seeks to illustrate the positive outcomes that can arise during the creation of a comprehensive transition plan using these two processes together, as utilized by a young man named Tyrell Weeks.

Tyrell attended school both in his home school district and at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. A charming young man, he liked to work, meet new people, and play video games. Tyrell is highly motivated to do his best and to be a role model for others. Using the Customized Employment model, a team formed around Tyrell. This team consisted of TSBVI staff, TWC caseworkers, local school staff, and family members. The steps the team followed were Discovery, Job Development, Internships, Training, and Competitive Employment.

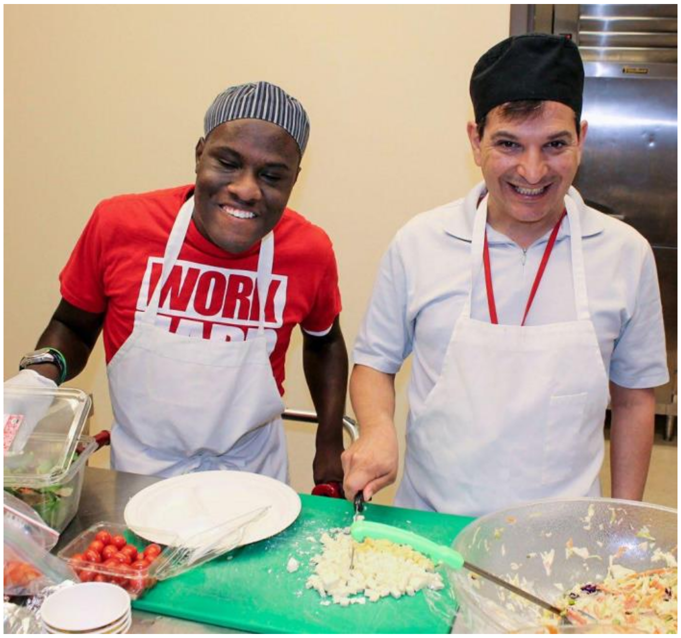


Photo of Tyrell and his teacher preparing food.

During the Discovery phase of Customized Employment, Tyrell participated in various vocational classes such as General Employability and Principles of Human Service. Tyrell also received instruction while rotating through on-campus work sites including a coffee shop, food service, animal care, and horticulture. Through these experiences Tyrell gradually became aware of his strengths within the work world as well as the challenges he faced in different job placements.

When Tyrell had sufficient experience to come to a decision about the kind of job he wanted, his team at his home school district looked for a job development opportunity in his community. Tyrell's dream was to work with children, specifically children with orthopedic impairments like himself. Tyrell very much wanted to be a role model for others because he had always longed for such when growing up. Tyrell's teacher was successful in securing an internship for him at a local rehabilitation center, where he cleaned and did various tasks. Although the placement was initially a volunteer position, Tyrell's Texas Workforce Commission caseworker was able to pay him using pre-employment training funds.

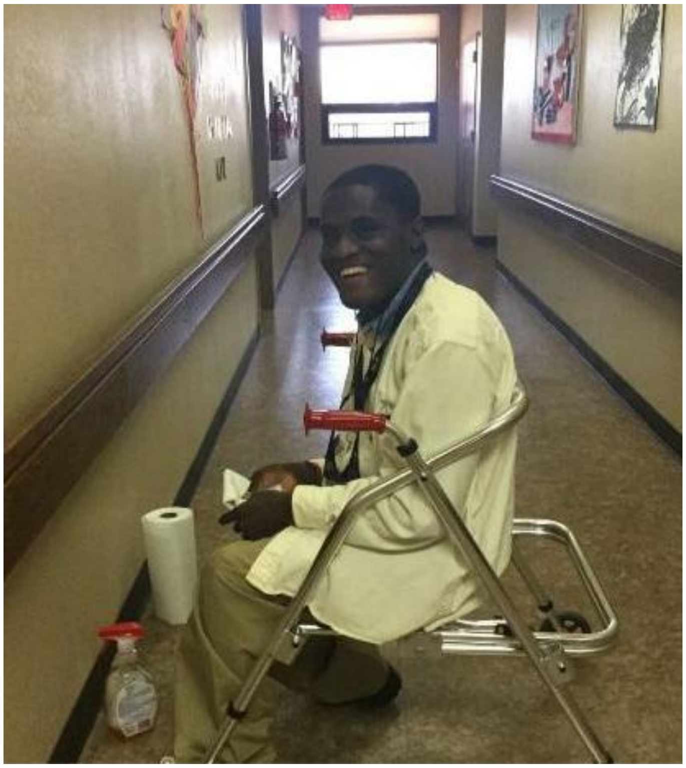


Photo of Tyrell sitting in his walker in a hallway with cleaning products.

Through contacts at the community Independent Living Center, Tyrell's TWC caseworker came across an unmet need. The center's director was writing a grant to start a program fixing and cleaning durable medical equipment such as walkers and wheelchairs. She was seeking someone to fill that position. When she met Tyrell she immediately pegged him for the job. At the same time, Tyrell's teacher helped Tyrell apply to a local college certificate program designed for students with disabilities. One of the certificates they offered was a certification in child care. Tyrell's teacher assisted him with all of the application paperwork and he was accepted into the program.

Throughout this entire process, Tyrell needed the support of a team to be successful. This support and cooperation helped Tyrell achieve his goals, but his need for such support does not end at age 22. Part of a Customized Employment plan is to establish a system at home, work, and in the community to provide needed assistance and guidance throughout adulthood. In an effort to establish such a support system, we looked to another model for help with decision-making about important events in Tyrell's life. Although he often needs help when deciding about issues that involve money and medical intervention, Tyrell is perfectly capable of making many more decisions that affect his life.

Because Tyrell and his family want him to retain the right to make his own decisions, they were not interested in obtaining legal guardianship over him in adulthood. To both provide the supports and a customized level of independence, he and his family decided to use a model call Supported Decision Making.

During the 2015 Texas Legislative Session, legislation was passed that recognized supported decision-making agreements as an informal alternative to guardianship. For Tyrell this means that medical information could be shared with both himself and his chosen "supporter." This will allow his "supporter" to assist Tyrell to make an informed decision about his medical care. According to the ARC of Texas, "using a supported decision-making agreement, a person with a disability chooses someone they trust to serve as their supporter." They then jointly complete a plan of support, so that the person receives support only in the areas in which it is needed.

A form created by the ARC of Texas can be obtained at the link below. This form can be used for the purpose of Supported Decision Making for people who will retain their right to make decisions about their life, while allowing for support from a trusted individual(s).

As for Tyrell, he is now participating in a certificate training program at his local college and living at home. Not everything worked out exactly as planned throughout this process, but the missteps contained important life lessons and guidance about steps that need to be taken. Through Tyrell's hard work, his family's support, and the use of a team approach, he has achieved his major goals to date and is looking towards a bright future.

For more information about Supported Decision Making, you may contact the ARC of Texas at (800) 252-9729 of the National Resource Center of Supported Decision-Making at (202) 448-1448. The following websites also contain additional information:
http://www.supporteddecisionmaking.org/legal-resource/supported-decision-making-tool-kit

https://www.thearcoftexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Supported_Decision_Making_For_Families_UPDATED_Jan_2016.pdf

Fast Friends

Molly Roberts, Texas Chargers Board Member, Denton

Abstract: The author shares her son's experience in making a friend while attending the 13th Annual International Charge Syndrome Conference, held in Orlando July 2017.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, Charge Syndrome, conference, friendship, social connections

The International Charge Syndrome Conference is our family reunion, and we would not miss the opportunity to connect and learn from other families and professionals. Our experience at this year's conference was unprecedented and the relationships we made affected us in a fresh new way.

This year we brought our son Christian, who has CHARGE syndrome, to the conference but left his siblings at home so we could focus completely on this experience with him. We made some remarkable memories together. Dad, Christian and I boarded a plane super early in the morning and made our way to

Florida. As usual, as we pulled up to the hotel we started recognizing faces and immediately felt at home. Home is not where you are, it is who is there. So, regardless of what state we are in, these incredible, unique, patient, loving individuals create a sense of acceptance that immediately make me feel like we belong.

The social on the first night of conference set the pace for the rest of the weekend. Typically, Christian prefers to stay on his iPad and not socialize. This night, however, we encouraged him to at least say hi and share his name with his peer group. Quickly he met Andrew, another teenager with CHARGE Syndrome. They had a lot in common: interests in How to Train Your Dragon and iPads. These two teenage guys sat by each other and communicated through sign and their iPads until the hotel staff had to close the room. Their interaction was extraordinary, so we decided creating opportunities for their friendship to grow would be the focus of our weekend.

The next day Christian attended camp for the morning session. He quickly started asking for his “friend,” Andrew. For the rest of the weekend, Andrew and Christian sat next to each other in sessions. They filled their time signing and using the iPad to share pictures, text messages and movies. The young men kept each other entertained, often laughing out loud at their inside jokes. The much anticipated event of the night was Signing Time with Rachel Coleman. The room filled with people with the little ones dancing and the big girls singing along. All the while, Andrew and Christian seemed engrossed in their own world — not alone but clearly a world of two guys who completely understood each other. Later that evening, all the moms went out for ladies’ night but the real party was in room 608, where the boys kept their connection full of life.

As usual, the session content was amazing and the speakers were top-notch. We have come to expect that we will glean new information to bring home to our communities. However, it was Christian’s new friendship with Andrew that was so unexpected and made this year’s conference our best one yet. We left Andrew and his mom with big hugs and the promise to maintain contact. We plan on seeing them at the next family reunion, in our home state of Texas in 2019.

DeafBlind Camp of Texas Has a Successful Second Year

Kim Huston, secretary, DeafBlind Camp of Texas

Abstract: The author shares her personal journey of understanding the unexpected challenges and gifts of being married while bringing up two children with disabilities. We invite you to check out Heather Joy's other blogs.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, service support providers (SSP), ProTactile, camp, recreation, leisure, self-determination, organization

The DeafBlind Camp of Texas (DBCTX) was started in March of 2016 by Andrew Cohen, Kelly Brittingham, Jacqueline Izaguirre, Todd Huston and Kim Huston. We all wanted the same thing: to have a barrier-free camp for DeafBlind adults. With fundraising, lots of hard work and much help from a community of volunteers, our second year was even better than we could have imagined!

Camp was held at Variety's Peaceable Kingdom from August 13 through 18. We had more than 50 people this year, including interpreters, SSPs, staff and 13 DeafBlind campers from as far away as Germany! We had braille menus, schedules and a 3-D-printed tactile map available to our campers. The camp is fully accessible to everyone. There were many activities to sign up for, including zip lining, high swing, high and low ropes, swimming, water slides, rock-climbing wall, archery, putt-putt golf, arts and crafts, messy games, bingo and more. Thanks to volunteers, we were able to also provide motorcycle rides, tandem bike rides, horseback riding and yoga! We had two representatives from NuEyes and Sprint giving technical presentations. The campers stayed busy throughout the week!

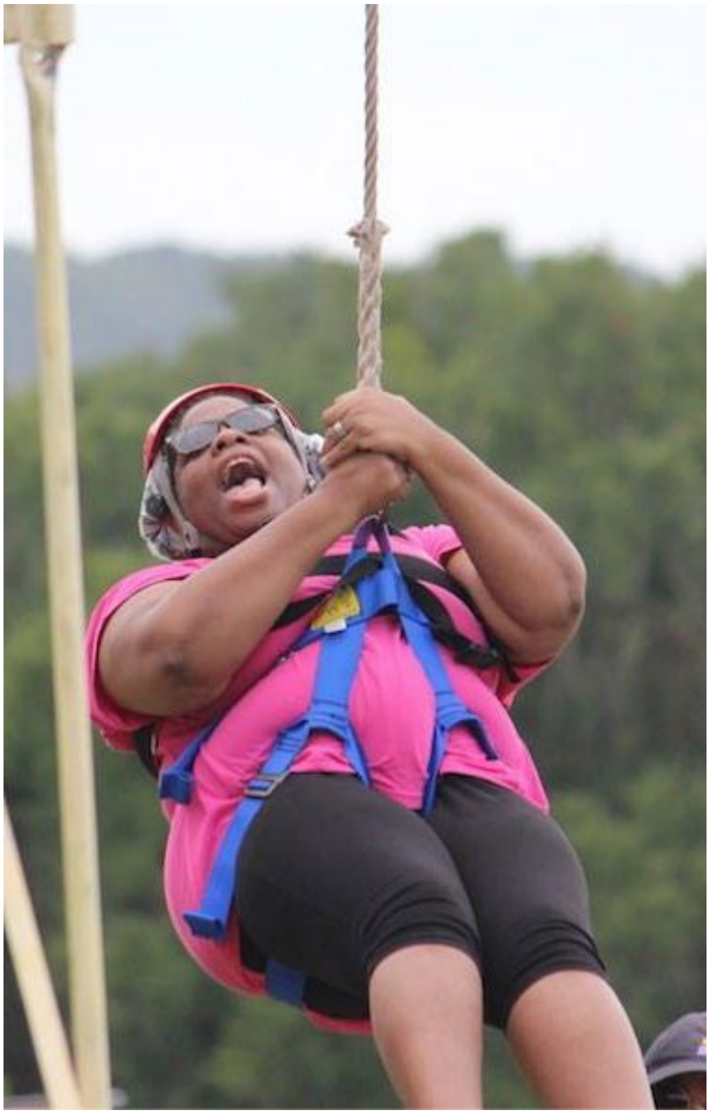
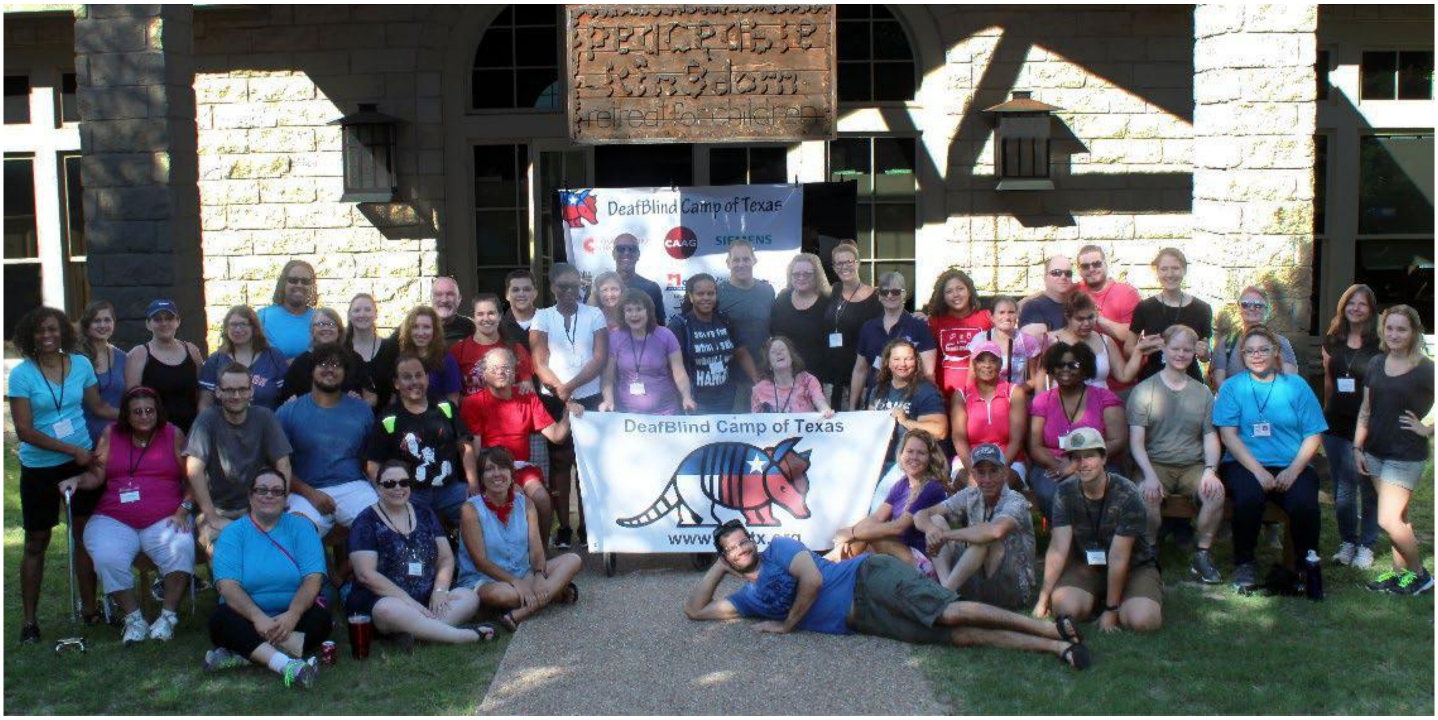


Photo of Bernie on the zip line.

Photo of Amanda, the author's daughter, swimming.

Thanks to our Support Service Provider (SSP) coordinators, Ingrid Martinez and Mark Mellenger, we were able to introduce a more cohesive schedule with several SSPs for each camper throughout the week. Incorporating this schedule allowed each SSP to have a shift off every day to enjoy the activities themselves and get some much-needed rest. Many of Lamar University and Austin Community College students came back to volunteer again this year. By using this system, we were able to have faction leaders (Doug Rollins, Barbara Johnson and Melinda Bogdanovich) on hand for any questions the SSPs may have had. We were very fortunate to be able to have Interpreters this year — Nancy Riley, Molly Sheridan, Shawn Whitley, Rachel Myers and Karah Murray-McKnight. Thanks to the help of Carie Barrett-Loya, we were able to offer 4.0 Board of Educational Interpreters (BEI) and Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) continuing educational units (CEUs) this year!



Group photo of DBCTX campers, SSPs and volunteers.

The SSPs did an amazing job giving the DeafBlind campers information in their form of communication. This included American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), Tactile ASL and PSE, platform interpreting, amplified sound, Universal Sign and written media. We all learned a few German signs, too! This really empowered the campers to feel comfortable in their surrounding and try new things. We had a couple of campers who did literally every activity we offered! The campers were very excited to meet and visit with each other. They loved the social time they had. Most are now Facebook friends and keeping in touch. We may have had a love connection, too!

It has been truly amazing to make this into a reality; however, we are not stopping here. Not only will we be holding a third annual DBCTX adult camp, but we are proud to announce we will have DBCTX Jr. for 2018! The camp will be over Labor Day Weekend (Aug. 31–Sept. 3, 2018). DBCTX Jr. will be for high school-age DeafBlind teens. The camp will also be held at Variety's Peaceable Kingdom with similar activities. However, DBCTX Jr. will include some transitional education as well. The roles and how to use SSP and interpreters is going to be introduced to the students, so it may be applicable in the “real world.” Self-advocacy and self-determination skills will be also taught to each student. They will make independent choices in activities. The campers will have the opportunity to meet other DeafBlind teens who are going through similar situations and understand they are not alone. They will be empowered do as much as they can for themselves while in a safe environment. Most of all, we hope to allow them to have a great camp experience!

Our camp is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Please remember we run on donations only. We appreciate all the volunteers from our community. A special thanks to Sarah Goodwin for coordinating transportation. Also a thank-you to Edgenie Bellah and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) for providing transportation to some of the campers for the second year. We feel blessed to have such an amazing DeafBlind Community to stand behind us. We know DBCTX Jr. will be as successful as DBCTX! For more information or to donate, go to www.dbctx.org. Also check us out on social media at Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Remember DeafBlind CAN at DBCTX! #Touch You Later!

What is ProTactile and What Are Its Benefits?

Sarah Morrison & Rhonda Voight-Campbell, ProTactile Consultants

Abstract: ProTactile is a socio-cultural philosophy with its own sets of philosophy, attitude, culture, and language. This emerging concept has become a way of life for the DeafBlind community. ProTactile plays an significant role in DeafBlind world. Members explore the world through touch, and most importantly communicate through touch. ProTactile is a language that the DeafBlind community embraces and benefits from as a way of life.

Keyword: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, ProTactile, sociocultural philosophy, access, communication

ProTactile is a sociocultural philosophy with its own sets of philosophy, attitude, culture, and language. The ProTactile Movement began by two DeafBlind women, aj granda and Jelica Nuccio. The overall approach emerged as a language as recently as 2010 by Jelica and aj along with a hearing sighted woman named Dr. Terra Edwards. This concept has actually been around for some time, since 2007, in the DeafBlind community. It was not recognized until recently due to lack of opportunities for DeafBlind members of the community to share their amazingly unique language, which is done through touch. This movement emerged in Seattle, Washington, where there is a large and amazing DeafBlind community. Seattle is considered a mecca for the DeafBlind community because of accessibility through ProTactile.

Pro in ProTactile signifies its meaning as in pro touch, pro connection, pro experience, pro accountability, pro ownership, pro identity. If you were to look up synonyms for the "pro" word, you would get these answers: for, favoring, with, support. Therefore, ProTactile (PT) is about supporting access to the world that surrounds a DeafBlind person through touch.

Attitude reflects on the stigma society has placed on the DeafBlind members of the community as well as those who are deaf disabled in general. ProTactile strives to shift the attitude from a medically based view to a culturally based view. Medical views are considered oppressive by the DeafBlind community, despite how "supportive" they may appear, while cultural views provide the DeafBlind community a sense of ownership, acclaimed identity, culture, community, and language as a marginalized group in a hearing-sighted dominant society. The aim is to shift the attitude of society's expectations for individuals to rely on sight as a way of life to support and encourage the belief that one can be autonomous and rely on touch as a way of life. After all, touch is a fundamental component of human nature; people communicate through touch (handshakes, hugs). Touch is a powerful communication tool.

ProTactile also plays an important part in DeafBlind culture. Members explore the world through touch and, most importantly, communicate through touch. ProTactile is a language that the DeafBlind community should embrace and benefit from, not be deprived of. Through ProTactile, they become included rather than excluded, neglected, left to fend for themselves. Body cues can be sensed through touch; for instance, if one is laughing or upset, this would be communicated through a hand movement on their arms or legs. Storytelling or exchanging valuable information can be expressed and conducted through PT. ProTactile is a form of communication that can be done two-way or more, not one-way.

There is a misconception that ProTactile provides one with visual information on their back, which is not the case. ProTactile is a whole, rounded approach where both parties exchange information. PT is not one way; PT is a reciprocal language, goes both ways between two people (or more) communicating. Like any other language, ProTactile is constantly evolving. Most importantly, PT encourages inclusion, autonomy, and equal access.

For more information about ProTactile and to request a training or workshop, go to http://protactileconnects.weebly.com. Through this site, there is a resource page with supplemental information, articles, and videos. You will also find DeafBlind artists and writers as well as a link to order PT shirts to show your support by raising awareness of PT.

To learn more about ProTactile, please visit http://protactileconnects.weebly.com. ProTactile Connects is a group of consultants who provide their expertise and knowledge of ProTactile, ensuring autonomy and access to ProTactile language for the DeafBlind community. ProTactile Connects offers workshops/trainings on ProTactile and DeafBlindhood. If you or your agency are interested in learning about ProTactile, you can send an email to ProTactile.Connects@gmail.com for further information on having a training or workshop.

We'd like to thank aj granda for your input with this article.

The Way Home

Bill Kenower, Parent

Abstract: A father describes his journey with his son, as he participated in treatment with Anat Baniel, who will be presenting at the Texas Focus Conference in March 2018.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, Autism Spectrum, fearlessness, behavior, therapeutic, threshold

The only therapeutic approach we tried with my son, Sawyer (and we tried many), which I had any real confidence in was the Anat Baniel Method. I met Anat when I interviewed her after the publication of her book, *Kids Beyond Limits*. I liked her immediately. She was passionate and funny and spoke about how all of her work with children with challenges far more profound than Sawyer's was not about *fixing* them but about *teaching* them. When I explained Sawyer's situation, she agreed to see him.

Things definitely began to change for Sawyer after we started visiting Anat. I do believe she helped teach him again what it felt like to be calm, something I am convinced he had forgotten. Her lessons helped awaken that part of his body where calmness is felt, a part that had gone into hibernation when perhaps all it had ever felt was panic. Better to go numb. The combination of her lessons and home schooling helped Sawyer remember who Sawyer actually was.

Yet what might have been even more important was what Anat taught me. Sawyer was very nervous during his first lesson with her. He was in a new city, a new building, meeting new people, and, as is the case with everyone, when he was nervous all his behavioral quirks became amplified. One of those quirks was to speak in an unfiltered stream-of-consciousness, his mind leaping from one taboo subject to another.

I had never seen this habit as pronounced as it was that afternoon in Anat's room. He had hardly said hello and he was rambling about homosexuality and murder and wanting to know if she was divorced and how old she was. Normally, this is where I'd intervene, but I was with a master, and I wanted to see how she would respond. She didn't. Everything he said seemed to pass by her like strangers on the street. That was when it hit me: She wasn't afraid of him.

I did not understand until that moment that I had become afraid of Sawyer. I was afraid not of what he would say or do to me, but of what his behavior meant about me — and not me his father, but me a person. What if there was some threshold we could cross from which there was no return? What if it was possible to wander so far from home that the way back not only couldn't be found but simply didn't exist anymore, as if we could be left on the moon by the last rocket ever launched?

That was the life I feared most. Sometimes the world seemed filled with people stranded on the moon, but it was easy to avoid them. They were strangers, living their stranded lives in faraway places, feeling more like characters in a play to me than actual people. But no one could be closer to me than my own son; I could not avoid him, and on that day he could not have sounded more lost. Yet there was Anat, fearless and indifferent, unafraid because she perceived nothing from which she needed protection. In that moment, her fearlessness became mine as well.

My job is not to be afraid, I thought to myself. It was the perfect job for me because it is all I have ever wanted. Fearlessness is the space where love waits for us. Every question I have ever asked was answered there and nowhere else, for there actually is nowhere else. There is only love and my dreams of desolate moons. Strangely, I traveled to the moon because it was where I thought I'd find everyone else, only to discover I was alone and looking for a way home.

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The Greater Impact of CVI in Phase III: Why do Students with CVI Continue to Need Services from the TVI?

Sara Kitchen and Lynne McAlister, TSBVI Outreach VI Specialists

Abstract: The authors discuss cortical visual impairment, Phase III and educational approaches for remediation.

Key Words: Phase III, Christine Roman-Lantzy, Christine Roman, CVI, vision services, social skills, comparative language, salient features, cortical visual impairment, literacy

Introduction

On March 10 and 11, 2017, we attended a training sponsored by the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, called “Assessing and Supporting the Student in Phase III CVI.” The speaker was Dr. Christine Roman-Lantzy, who has been researching cortical visual impairment intensely for a number of years. In 2007, her landmark publication, *Cortical Visual Impairment: An Approach to Assessment and Intervention,* was released by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) Press. It provided a comprehensive approach to assessment and intervention that focused on 10 unique characteristics associated with CVI. A revised edition is scheduled to be published in the fall of 2017. Also in the works is Dr. Roman’s new book, *Cortical Visual Impairment: Advanced Principles*, which includes information on assessment and intervention for students with CVI, particularly those functioning in Phase III. This new book is expected to be published in the spring of 2018 by AFB Press.

Cortical visual impairment is the most common form of visual impairment in developed countries that primarily use western medical techniques and is a result of neurological damage or structural differences in the brain. Dr. Roman explained that individuals with CVI develop their visual skills more slowly over time. Part of the rate of development depends on whether their environment is conducive to building neurological connections. Their vision becomes increasingly “normal” over time. In the early stages of visual development, the child is learning to see and act upon what they see. Dr. Roman refers to these stages as CVI Phase I and Phase II. Theoretically a child spends a limited amount of time in Phase I, in which they learn that visual targets exist but are not yet able to use their vision when there is competing visual or other sensory input. Dr. Roman refers to Phase I as “building visual behavior.” A child may spend a longer period of time in Phase II integrating visual information with other sensory information such as touch. Phase II is referred to as “integrating vision with function.” During Phase II, an individual must act upon and have an effect on their environment with opportunities to repeat actions. This cements neurological connections. The individual must also interact with enough environmental variance to maintain curiosity and support continued development. The brain's dorsal stream, known as the "where" system, communicates between the eyes and brain about the locations of visual targets and is the first communication pathway to develop between the eyes and brain. This happens during Phase I and Phase II. The ventral stream, or the "what" system, helps the eyes communicate with the brain about the classification of a visual target. The ventral stream begins to develop in mid-to-high Phase II and continues to develop throughout life. Individuals with CVI remain in Phase III, in which the vision system approaches typical vision, for the rest of their lives. The reason why the 10 characteristics associated with CVI do not "resolve" completely is due to the fact that visual information is limited during early development, when a great deal of pruning happens in the brain. In Phase III, the focus is on looking to learn, which can be very difficult if strategies for using and refining the ventral stream are not being targeted. During her presentation, Dr. Roman enumerated skills that many individuals with Phase III CVI still need to develop. She also explained how to teach those skills.

What does Phase III look like?

Cortical visual impairment is apparent when individuals present with 10 unique visual characteristics, as defined by Dr. Roman. These characteristics are expressed differently within each phase. The following describes how each characteristic of CVI is manifested in Phase III:

- Color: The individual may have been attracted to a particular color in the past but is able to look at items that are of many colors. The preferred color may continue to serve as a visual anchor, making visual information easier to find. The need for highlighting using color never goes away.
- Movement: The individual may be very easily distracted by moving items or may need to move their own body or head to see better.
- Latency: Students may have a first answer of "I don't know" as a strategy to accommodate for this characteristic; they may need to spend a little longer time to attend to, discriminate, or identify a typical visual target. If a child is having trouble responding to visual targets in Phase III, it may be a sign that he or she is experiencing visual fatigue and needs a break. One good rule of thumb given by Dr. Roman is that the number of minutes on an intensely visual task should not exceed the child's age in years.
- Fields: The lower fields are frequently less functional for tasks. The individual may have difficulty with stairs and may be confused in an environment that has changed, such as a familiar room that has recently been reorganized. Even if an eye report states that all visual fields are intact, consider that this may only apply in the quiet, uncluttered, controlled setting of an eye doctor's office.
- Complexity:
    - If an object is too visually complex, you may see task avoidance.
    - Salient features need to be identified to help the student build visual memory (see next section).
    - Complexity of Array: If too many objects are presented, the individual may not be able to

  pick out an object. In the classroom, preferential seating may help to decrease competing visual and auditory information. In certain settings, it may help to dim lights or use spotlighting on visual targets. (Note to TVIs: When all of the APH complexity cards have been completed, this equals a score of 7 on the CVI Range.)
  - Complexity of the Sensory Environment: You may see light gazing, fatigue, rubbing eyes, changing the topic, a tantrum, or seizures if instruction is not modified by giving breaks or making the environment less stimulating.
  - Faces: Individuals will still have difficulty recognizing people by facial features alone and may rely on the face, body shape or voice to recognize a person. Eye contact does not equal facial discrimination.
- Light: A focus light may help the individual find or maintain focus on a visual target. Hazy days may affect vision as objects stand out less in diffused light. A backlit display like a tablet or computer screen may help to draw visual attention and make looking easier.
- Reflexes: Protective visual blink reflexes could be typical at this phase, or slow or intermittent. A blink to threat response can be latent or intermittent if the individual is fatigued. This characteristic is the only one that may “resolve” completely and not interfere with visual performance.
- Novelty: Visual curiosity is seen at Phase III, though just the ability to look at new materials does not mean that novelty is no longer interfering with vision. Individuals must learn to look for features of visual targets that are familiar. What is it similar to? What makes it different? What could it be? (See section below on Comparative Language.) Processing novelty requires an ability to access a visual library, which in individuals with CVI must be developed through strategies and intervention.
- Visual Motor: Many times, individuals with Phase III CVI are able to look at and act upon an object simultaneously. Characteristics such as novelty or complexity may affect this skill. An individual builds sensory concepts based upon multiple experiences of physically interacting with objects.
- Distance: An individual with Phase III CVI may continue to have trouble identifying objects and people in complex environments such as crowds or when distance results in increased visual clutter. Distant visual targets may not be recognized due to this interference.

Building a Visual Library and Strengthening the Ventral Stream

Dr. Roman refers to two informational streams within the brain that require development through organized, mindful intervention for an individual with CVI. The first to develop is the dorsal stream, or the “where” system. Typically, this is the dominant informational stream in Phases I and II. The dorsal stream alerts a person to where an item is in space and does not discriminate details about the object. Initially, the individual may just become aware that something is there. The sense of exactly where an object is in space develops next during Phase II. Last to develop is the ventral stream, or the “what” system. This enables an individual to enlist visual memory to recognize, discriminate, and then eventually to identify visual targets. Guided practice is required to bring attention to elements that make an item recognizable, then discriminable, and finally, identifiable.

Teachers and parents may help an individual with Phase III CVI view internal details using modifications, discussing internal details, and comparing them with familiar visual items.

Identifying salient features and comparing them to familiar objects utilizes an individual's ventral stream. This results in a faster and more efficient visual process. When the ventral stream is faster, less work is required to access the visual library and identify objects. Visual processing becomes easier.

Salient Features

Salient features are the distinctive and recognizable visual elements that define an item such as internal details, shape, color, pattern, etc. What visual features do animals have? Four legs and a tail? Do all dogs have floppy ears? Do all cats have pointy ears? Individuals with CVI may need help directing their attention to these types of details. When targeting an item, encourage the individual to use their own descriptors to identify salient features; for example, a picture of a coiled snake might look like a rolled-up garden hose the individual has had direct experience with. Joint attention is required for discussing salient features. Both the adult and the child must be looking at the same feature. It is best to follow the child's lead as this reflects their current understanding and visual perception of the salient feature. Salient features that somebody else perceives as important about the item may not even be seen by the child. As you follow the child's lead, assist them in choosing two or three visual descriptors and consistently use those to help them remember what the important details are. Team members should be aware of which visual descriptors the child has chosen for a targeted item and be consistent in using them to provide the child with less confusion and more time to practice.

Comparative Language

Comparative language is the way to talk about salient features and establish joint attention. Using comparative language encourages the analysis of visual targets to discover how certain features make them the same as or different from items that are already in the individual's visual library. Joint attention is required for understanding what items are foremost in an individual's visual library and what may be missing. After new visual items are fully understood, they can be added to the visual library. As the visual library is grown and accessed more, the ventral stream is strengthened. We use comparative language to discuss, practice, and cement visual memories and tie new information to those visual memories.

Literacy

Visual literacy media could include objects, pictures, or letters and words. In order for an individual to be able to use letters and words, they must show that they are not only able to identify, discriminate and produce phonemes but also to identify visual details. This signals that the ventral stream has begun to work. All the components of reading should be taught including phonemic awareness. Letter-sound production and recognition must be intact in order to make words and letters have meaning. Photographs of real objects and settings taken with complexity considerations can continue to serve to support memory, just as pictures in books support memory and understanding for a typical learner. The whole alphabet does not have to be known before literacy instruction with letters and words begin, in fact, letter drilling should be avoided. Teaching literacy should be child-guided and fun. Make use of all four approaches to literacy: phonics, personal experience, participation, and whole words. Each approach contains important components that support reading competency.

Most fluent readers look at the shape of a word while reading instead of looking at all of the letters. Even if a word is degraded, a fluent reader can fill in the blanks and determine the correct word fairly quickly. Individuals with CVI benefit from instruction in word shapes. Start by picking two words that are important to the child. These two words should differ greatly in shape and be able to be discriminated easily without any of the internal details, or letters. Words should be outlined in the student’s preferred color. The shape of the word can be discussed, comparing parts of the word to familiar items. Encourage your student to come up with the language to describe the shape, such as “orange” starts with a ball shape. An orange is also ball-shaped. As you begin, use lower case letters as they are easier to interpret.

Often students in Phase III have many negative associations with reading due to lack of success. High-interest words that have been identified by the child and that are visually different will be easier for them to recognize and discriminate. This will provide the student with a sense of accomplishment with reading that they may never have felt before. Have them match the shape with the cut-out shape on a piece of black paper, like a puzzle. As the child begins to more easily identify word shapes according to the student-identified salient features, begin to embed the words in short and simple connected text about the high-interest word. Ask the child to pick out the familiar word shape as you read the other words. Now you are reading together.

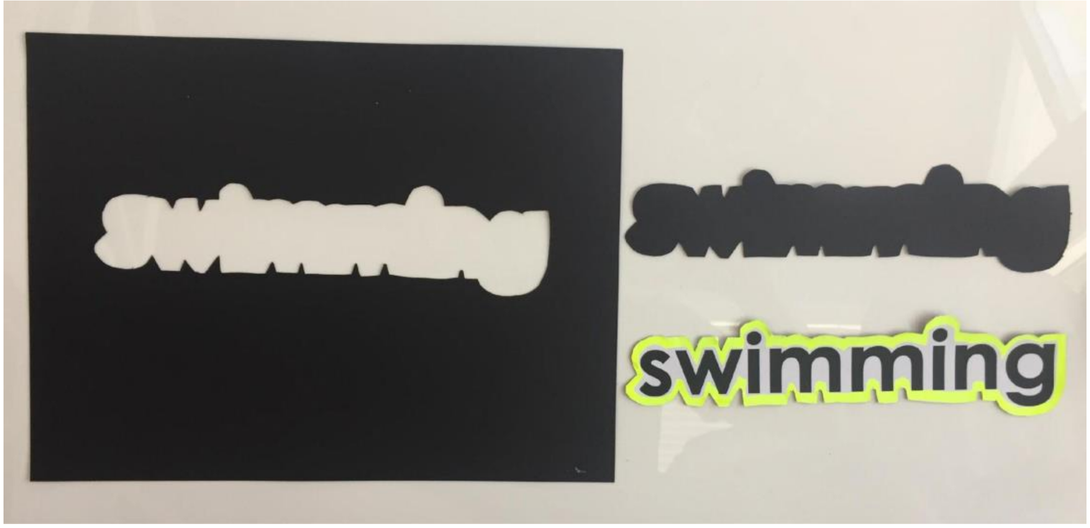


Figure 1: A black paper with the outlined shape of the word “swimming” cut out of it, next to the black cutout of the word, and the word swimming, outlined in yellow and cut out. All are glued to magnet paper and are presented on the white, magnetic side of the “All-In-One Board” from American Printing House for the Blind (APH).

The Impact of CVI on Social Skills

In Phase III, CVI characteristics such as difficulty with visual novelty, complexity, and detecting information at a distance can affect an individual's perception of social behavior. Social behavior is communicated largely through subtle facial expression, body language, and group action. Social skills are learned through imitation of these behaviors. Social behaviors that are not perceived cannot be imitated. Factors that put children with CVI at risk in the area of social skills include:

- Difficulty with discrimination of faces, facial expression, and mood
- Learning from visual imitation may be challenging
- Inability to deal with new, unfamiliar visual materials
- Busy and unfamiliar environments can't be understood or safely negotiated
- Activities occurring at a distance are missed

Mediated play groups or play buddies may help children develop social skills. In these settings, complexity may be reduced by having fewer participants. The children should be encouraged to play together and work out their issues without the adult. The adult may help by describing what other kids are doing and may be more of a facilitator but not a play partner. A social assessment and curriculum may be used to address specific social skills. Goals and objectives in the area of social skills should be considered a necessary targeted area on the IEP.

Tasks that require the use of vision throughout the day to learn content, such as reading and writing, navigating environments using visual cues at a distance, and learning social skills will continue to be challenging for an individual with CVI functioning at Phase III. Much guidance is required at this phase for students to have success. A knowledgeable professional can provide this guidance for areas in which CVI characteristics continue to interfere with learning. This person can also work with the team so that they can begin to understand the impact of CVI, which may be invisible to many, and provide necessary accommodations such as pre-teaching, sensory breaks, preferential seating, reduced noise in the environment, a study buddy, etc.

Conclusion

Interfering visual characteristics are the least obvious in Phase III CVI as compared with the other phases. The student's vision is used throughout the day and in many different environments. However, these characteristics continue to interfere with vision and visual fatigue is significant. Unfortunately, the services of a teacher of the visually impaired are often reduced for these students. Appropriate interventions for literacy and social skills require highly specialized knowledge and skills. It is suggested that services from a TVI should be maintained rather than decrease for a student in Phase III CVI.

Editor's Note: TSBVI Outreach is pleased to announce that Dr. Roman-Lantzy will speak at the Texas Focus 2018 Pre-Conference on March 1 about Phase III Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). She will present two sessions during Texas Focus Conference on March 2. One session will provide participants with a view into Dr. Roman's new work. The second will be a question-answer session with Dr. Roman.

The Nine Essentials of the Anat Baniel Method

Anat Baniel

Abstract: The author describes an approach to learning and brain development involving changes in thinking.

Key Words: Neuromovement, brain plasticity, Nine Essentials, attention, movement, neuroscience

The "Nine Essentials" form the core of the Anat Baniel Method. Each of the Nine Essentials describes one of the brain's requirements for waking up and doing its job well — that is, creating new connections and avoiding rigidity and automaticity when needing to overcome pain and limitation to thus reach new levels of physical and cognitive performance. It has been validated by modern science's latest discoveries in the area of brain plasticity, the brain's ability to change and grow new neurological pathways and connections throughout life. The Nine Essentials offer you concrete, effective and immediate ways to easily tap into your brain's enormous potential. With the Nine Essentials, the brain becomes a brilliant problem solver, leading to breakthroughs in movement abilities, pain relief and peak performance.

Essential 1: Movement with Attention

Movement is life. Movement helps the brain grow and form. The brain is organized through movement. In turn, it is the brain that organizes all movement: the movement of our body, our thinking, our feelings and our emotions. But movement alone is not enough.

Automatic movement, movement done without attention, only grooves in the already existing patterns. When we bring attention to what we feel as we move, the brain immediately starts building billions of new neurological connections that usher in changes, learning and transformation.

Essential 2: The Learning Switch

The brain is either in a learning mode (the learning switch on) or not. Healthy young children have their learning switch on and the dial turned on "high." Their eyes are bright, their movement lithe, and they are full of energy.

Repetition, drill, and everyday stresses, as well as habitual patterns of thought, exercise and emotions, all tend to turn the learning switch off. The same happens when a child has special challenges or a person has suffered trauma or injury. For the brain to properly do its job, the "learning switch" needs to be on. Once on, at any age, life becomes a wonderful new adventure, filled with movement, creativity and new possibilities.

Essential 3: Subtlety

We have all heard the expressions "no pain, no gain" and "try harder." However, in order to overcome pain and limitation and to thrive, the brain needs the exact opposite: less force. For the brain to receive new information, it needs to perceive differences. By reducing the force with which we move and think, we increase our sensitivity. With the resulting increased sensitivity, we greatly enhance our brain's ability to perceive the finest of differences. These perceptions give the brain the new information it needs to organize successful action and become more alive and vital in both body and mind.

Essential 4: Variation

Variation is everywhere, and is more than just the spice of life. It's a necessity for optimum health. Variation provides your brain with the richness of information it needs to create new possibilities in your movements, feelings, thoughts and actions. It helps increase your awareness and lifts you out of rigidity and "stuckness." By introducing variation and playfulness into everything you do, you awaken all your senses. New ideas occur and new possibilities emerge in your life.

Essential 5: Slow

Fast, we can only do what we already know. That is how the brain works. To learn and master new skills and overcome limitation, the first thing to do is slow way down. Slow actually gets the brain's attention and stimulates the formation of rich new neural patterns. Slow gets us out of the automatic mode in our movements, speech, thoughts and social interactions. It lets us feel and experience life at a deeper, more profound level.

Essential 6: Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is self-generated; it is a skill you can develop, choose to do and become good at. Enthusiasm tells your brain what is important to you, amplifying whatever that is, making it stand out, infusing it with energy to grow more. Enthusiasm is a powerful energy that lifts you and inspires you and others. It lights up your brain, helping to usher in changes, transforming the most mundane situation or task, adding meaning and generating delight. Enthusiasm helps make the impossible possible.

Essential 7: Flexible Goals

"Keeping your eyes on the prize" is a great way for most people to fail. Freeing yourself from the compulsion to achieve a goal in a certain way and at a certain time keeps you open-minded. You are available to recognize opportunities you might never have noticed had you been fixed on a too rigidly set course. There is no way to know in advance the path that will lead you to achieving your goal. Know your goal and embrace all the unexpected steps, missteps and reroutes; they are a rich source of valuable information for your brain to lead you to your goal. Flexible goals will reduce your anxiety and increase your creativity, resulting in greater success, vitality and joy.

Essential 8: Imagination and Dreams

Einstein said, "Imagination is everything. It is the preview to life's coming attractions." Through imagination, your brain figures out new possibilities before actually having to perform. When imagining, the brain grows new neural connections. Our dreams call upon us from our future. They give us our unique life path to follow and guide our brains to continue growing and developing. Your imagination and dreams give you the ability to create something that has never been there before, transcending your current limitations and leading you to develop your authentic life path.

Essential 9: Awareness

"Aware-ing," the action of generating awareness, is to be knowledgeable about what you are doing, sensing, thinking and experiencing at any given moment. Aware-ing is the opposite of automaticity and compulsion. It is a unique human capacity that can catapult us to remarkable heights. When you are aware you are fully alive and present. Your brain is working at its highest level, noticing subtle nuances of what is going on around and within you, revealing options and potentials, greatly accelerating learning. You are enlivened and joyful, contributing to others, becoming more enlightened, and fulfilling more and more of your human destiny.

Editor's Note: TSBVI Outreach is pleased to announce that Anat Baniel will be the keynote presenter speaking about the Nine Essentials at Texas Focus in Austin, TX, March 1–3, 2018.

What Is Yoga and How Can It Benefit My Child with a Visual Impairment?

Kassandra Maloney, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired COMS, Certified Yoga Teacher

Abstract: Yoga is a safe and effective exercise for children with visual impairment because of the gentle nature of this exercise and its tactile barrier of safety, which is the yoga mat.

Key Words: yoga, exercise, motor planning, self-determination, spatial awareness, communication, literacy

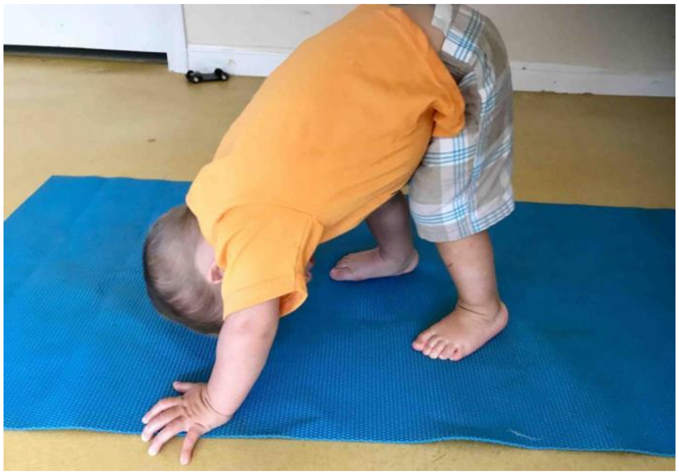


Figure 1: Young child attempting a headstand on a yoga mat.

There has been a lot of talk about yoga lately. Many people tout the benefits of yoga, including improved energy levels, cardiovascular health, and increased flexibility. While the general public has seen dramatic results from incorporating yoga into their lives, yoga has even more benefits for children with visual impairment.

Yoga is a safe and effective exercise for children with visual impairment. Because of the gentle nature of this exercise and its tactile barrier of safety (our yoga mats), the exercise practice of yoga boasts a plethora of benefits for children with visual impairment.

When I first started teaching at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), (the ever-wonderful) Linda Hagood was teaching yoga to children with visual and multiple impairment. I was lucky enough to see firsthand the miracles that were happening with our students. These included increased skills in communication, self-determination, and literacy. Of course, as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist, I was most fascinated by the increased motor planning and spatial awareness skills. This simple form of exercise has helped to shape hundreds of lives of children with visual impairment. It can help your child improve their life as well.

What is yoga?

Yoga is a form of exercise that focuses on both your body and your breath. The breathing component is what makes it so powerful as a tool to use after the yoga session is over. As a practice within our schools, yoga is not a form of religion or spirituality. It is simply a very accessible mode of exercise that is motivating, fun, challenging, and beneficial to people with visual impairment.

You may have been to a yoga class or seen one depicted in the media. Just like those classes, children often use yoga mats or other soft, nonslippery surfaces to practice. People move their bodies in different poses within this space to get exercise and to focus on their breathing. As with any exercise, yoga helps make you happy, gives your heart more power, and helps release stress. Aside from the exercise benefits, our children with visual impairment benefit greatly from this practice.

Benefits of Yoga for Children with Visual Impairment

1. Increases motor planning by having to learn new movements: Yoga poses are not typical walking, sitting, standing postures. Many of the poses are new movements for our children. As you teach your child how to move in a new way, their brain is learning new ways to plan their movements. The brain creates new pathways with this new information. Then, as they begin to plan movements off of the mat, their brains can readily pull out the information about the new movement pattern. For example, if your child has been experiencing difficulty getting their backpack off their shoulders and onto their school chair, they may start to use the twist that they learned in yoga to help them move their body and put their backpack on their chair.
2. Increases body and spatial awareness by having to move your body in new ways: When your child is asked to move one arm above their head, they may lift their arm out to the side. Yoga creates a safe space for the caregiver to gently help your child learn where “above” their body is. By helping the body move to the correct place around their body and the proprioceptive feedback given to the brain from the position, the child then has a better understanding of where “above” her head is.
3. Increases communication skills when the child is asked to communicate during the session.
4. In typical yoga classes at a studio, a teacher often gives directions to the class and the class members move without talking. Yoga with children with visual impairment is wildly different than your “typical” class. In a yoga session with children with visual impairment, the children are often active participants in their literacy and communication. Not only are children often asked to engage with one another (if there is more than one student in the session), but they are also encouraged to engage with the teacher. They may be asked to make a choice between yoga poses, plan a story to be read within the

yoga session, or engage in a conversation about the yoga session.

5. Increases self-determination skills by giving the students challenges that they can eventually overcome.
6. The inherent challenges that we face when we are asked to do something new facilitate self-determination skills. Many children find yoga poses to be a fun challenge. Once they learn how to do the pose, their sense of self-determination increases immeasurably. Any exercise program that you complete once a week for at least 12 weeks has scientifically been proven to increase your self-determination skills as well.
7. Increases literacy when stories, lists, and other literacy is infused.
8. When practicing yoga, many teachers use braille, large print, or tactile symbol lists to help their students practice literacy skills in a fun and engaging way.

Ready to try yoga with your child with visual impairment?

Try incorporating these three poses into their day. You can have a separate yoga session, or incorporate these poses into a "yoga break," where they can do a little movement between seated activities.

Sunshine Breath from seated:

Bring your hands together so that your palms touch.
As you breathe in, keep your hands together and lift your arms up towards the ceiling.
As you breathe out, separate your hands out to the side and bring your arms down to your sides. (Teacher's note: Have the child place their hands on either the ground or the seat of the chair.) Continue with this breathing pattern for five breaths.

Reaching Mountain Pose

Come to standing. (You can stand behind your chair, desk, or table if you were just sitting.)
Lift your arms up towards the ceiling, strong and straight.
Feel your belly get bigger when you inhale.
Blow out and feel your belly come down.
Have the student breathe in and out for three to five breaths.

Moon Pose from standing with your arms above your head:

Hold your hands together. Interlace your fingers. (Use other words such as "glue your hands together" if those concepts work better.) Lean over to the left.
Breathe in, feel your belly get bigger.
Breathe out, feel your belly come down.
Breathe in and out for three breaths.
Keep your hands together, arms strong and straight, and lean over to the right.
Breathe in, feel your belly get bigger.
Breathe out, feel your belly come down.
Breathe in and out for three breaths.

Get creative and use the words that are appropriate for your individual student. For example, if a student does not know what a ceiling is, you may want to either use the teachable moment to explore a ceiling, or use the word "sky" instead.

Editor's Note: We are pleased to announce that Kassandra Maloney will be a presenter at Texas Focus 2018 in Austin, Texas, March 1– 3, 2018.

Spanish Braille and English Language Learners

Scott Baltisberger, TSBVI Outreach Education Consultant

Abstract: Some common concerns and misconceptions when addressing braille issues of Spanish-speaking students.

Key Words: Braille, Spanish braille code, Unified English Braille

In a nation with a large immigrant population, issues regarding bilingual education for learners with visual impairment arise on a regular basis. As children from Latin American backgrounds continue to comprise the majority of students with limited English proficiency in this country, Spanish is the language that is most commonly involved in these situations.

Language can have a significant impact on any area of the Expanded Core Curriculum, of course, but it is addressing early literacy for functionally blind, Spanish-speaking students that often appears to be particularly daunting for school staff and families alike. Bilingual education teachers have concerns that they do not know braille. Teachers of students with visual impairment worry about their lack of knowledge and experience in bilingual education. Families may wonder if learning braille should take precedence over their child's need for native language instruction.

I've found these concerns are often based on limited familiarity with the Spanish braille code and how it compares to Unified English Braille. For the purposes of early braille acquisition, it is helpful to remember that the uncontracted versions of the two codes are virtually identical. Both employ the same dot configurations for all letters of the alphabet as well as most function symbols. Spanish does have an additional set of seven symbols for accented letters (á, é, í, ó, ú, ü and ñ) and there are some differences in formatting that reflect differences in the two written languages (such as Spanish having question marks and exclamation marks both before and after text). Due to the close similarity in the two codes, literacy skills gained in Spanish braille will transfer to use in English braille with relative ease.

The contracted forms do have significant differences, but at this time these have little relevance for primary education programs since contracted Spanish braille materials are not widely available in this country.

Below are some common concerns and misconceptions that I've encountered when addressing braille issues regarding Spanish-speaking students. By sharing this document with teachers and administrators, I hope it will clarify the relationship between Spanish braille and UEB and assuage some of the worries they may feel. I am currently working on a Spanish version of the document that can be shared with parents as well.

FAQs: Spanish Braille

How does braille work?

Braille is used throughout the world as a literacy medium for people who are blind. The system consists of a system of “cells” of six possible dots. Different configurations of dots have different meanings, either as letters, words, parts of words, punctuation, or “functions” such as capitalization or accents. Braille systems used to represent languages with different print orthographical systems, such as Japanese and English, are quite different. Systems representing languages that use similar orthographical systems, such as Spanish and English (both of which use the Latin alphabet), are quite similar.

How are Spanish braille and English braille the same?

Within both English and Spanish, there are two braille “codes.” There is an “uncontracted” code in which each braille cell represents a letter, number or punctuation mark. These codes are almost identical in English and Spanish since both languages use essentially the same orthographical system. The only real variations are that Spanish has additional braille cells to represent seven commonly occurring accented letters — á, é, í, ó, ú, ü and ñ — and also some punctuation symbols are different. In either language, a young blind student typically learns this basic, uncontracted code first.

How are Spanish braille and English braille different?

There are also “contracted” codes for both languages in which one or two braille cells represent entire words or parts of words. For this reason, there are significant differences between contracted English and Spanish braille, as the words and parts of words that are common in one language may not be common in the other. The purpose of contracted codes is to enable individuals to read with greater speed and fluency. Typically, a student learns the contracted code after they have developed some degree of literacy proficiency with the uncontracted code.

Does it cause difficulty for a student if he or she begins to learn braille in Spanish and then switches to the English braille code?

No! Just as a sighted learner is able to transfer skills and concepts of print literacy from Spanish to English, a blind student will transfer skills and concepts in uncontracted Spanish braille to uncontracted English braille. A student will not have to learn an entirely new code when moving from one language to the other. Once the student has gained proficiency with uncontracted English braille, he or she can progress to the contracted form.

In the United States, Spanish braille materials are available almost exclusively in the uncontracted code. Similarly, state-adopted materials for use in bilingual education and ESL are provided for the most part in uncontracted Spanish braille. Materials for use in Spanish language classes at the secondary level are also in uncontracted braille. For these reasons, there is little need at this time for a student to learn the contracted form of Spanish in order to benefit from educational activities in public schools.

Can a TVI who does not speak Spanish teach braille to a student with limited English proficiency who is being taught in bilingual education classes?

Yes! Every student for whom braille has been identified as his or her primary learning media must receive services from a certified teacher for students with visual impairment (TVI). The role of the TVI is to ensure that the student gains proficiency in the braille code. In situations in which a TVI does not have fluency in Spanish and is working with a student with limited English skills, the TVI should collaborate with a bilingual paraprofessional or volunteer who can address the language needs of the student during braille lessons.

The TVI is not responsible for teaching academic subjects, such as language arts, science and math, to the braille student; this is the role of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher is not responsible for teaching the student braille; this is the role of the TVI. With sufficient braille proficiency, the student is able to access all classroom materials provided by the classroom teacher, assuming these materials have been transcribed into braille. The classroom teacher is responsible for providing materials to the TVI before presenting them in her lessons with reasonable time so that they may be transcribed. Student responses will be done in braille and will also need to be transcribed to print, by the TVI, so that the classroom teacher can monitor the student's work.

Because of the close similarities between English and Spanish braille, the TVI will be able to transcribe materials with minimal difficulty. There are a number of easy-to-read Spanish braille "cheat sheets" that provide a quick reference for a TVI working in this situation. Some example can be found at:
Hadley School:
www.hadley.edu/Resources_list/spanishbraille.docx
Word Press:
https://spanishbraille.wordpress.com/2009/04/29/spanish-braille-cheat-sheet/
American Foundation for the Blind:
http://braillebug.afb.org/foreign_language_braille.asp

To ensure that a blind student with limited English proficiency acquires proficiency in braille and is fully integrated into general education classes, all members of the educational team should have a clear understanding of their respective roles and work together in a collaborative approach. The situation does present certain challenges, but these can be met and surmounted through ongoing communication and cooperation.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired: 100 Years on 45th Street

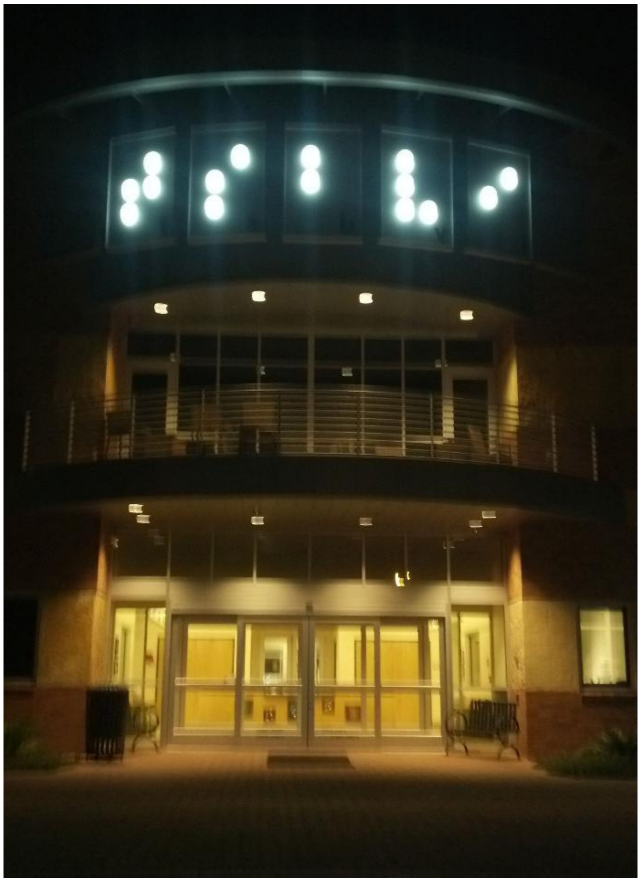
William Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: In this article, Superintendent Daugherty shares a number of changes that have occurred at TSBVI in the past 100 years.

Key Words: TSBVI, DeafBlind, blind, visually impaired

Founded by the Texas Legislature in 1856 as the Blind Asylum, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has had several names and several locations over the past 161 years. The current 45th Street location in Austin was constructed in 1916, and the first classes were held in November of 1917. In conjunction with the school's annual Parent Weekend event, TSBVI will have a small celebration in honor of this milestone on Saturday, Nov. 11, at 2 p.m. in the school's auditorium. The public is invited.

Records and reports from the TSBVI's early years on 45th Street tell us that the school grew much of its own food on the campus's 73 acres (now 40 acres). The curriculum focused heavily on music, domestic skills, and trades such as broom making and chair caning. Over time the curriculum grew to be more academic in nature. In the 1950s many students began coming to TSBVI as a result of being administered too much oxygen as newborns in incubators. Later, an epidemic of rubella caused a large spike in the number of children with DeafBlindness. The epidemic led the school to develop curriculum and instruction related to communication skills, behavior intervention, and multiple disabilities. In the mid 1970s the passage of federal special education law led to more and more students being educated in their local schools. During the next two decades or so, TSBVI began to develop new areas of service such as curricular publications, statewide outreach service, and short-term programs in order to support the majority of students who were in the independent school districts across the state.



TSBVI at night

The school changed its name from the Texas School for the Blind to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in the 1980s in recognition that many of TSBVI's students had low vision. Soon after, the separate program for students with DeafBlindness and multiple disabilities combined with the regular elementary, middle and high school to form what we refer to today as Comprehensive Programs. Comprehensive Programs, Short Term Programs (ISD students only), and Statewide Outreach now comprise the three main service delivery arms of TSBVI, and each is among the highest quality programs of their type in the nation. The school's curricular publications and website have grown to be highly valued resources at the state, national, and international levels.

Over the past 10 years, the 1917 campus has been totally rebuilt into the modern and beautiful school we have today. An attractive campus and an outstanding mission align well at TSBVI.

In practice, our mission is to look for opportunities to serve every student with a visual impairment in the state, regardless of where they attend school. This diversified service-delivery model that extends well beyond the TSBVI campus has led to ever higher levels of collaboration with parents, schools, education service centers, universities and other organizations concerned with blindness and visual impairment. The continued support of the school and its mission by the Texas Legislature over the past 100 years has been an essential ingredient in TSBVI's success, and not all schools for the blind in the U.S. have had such support from the state level. It is this support that has allowed TSBVI to develop into a center of expertise worthy of a celebration on Nov. 11, 2017. You are welcome to join us.

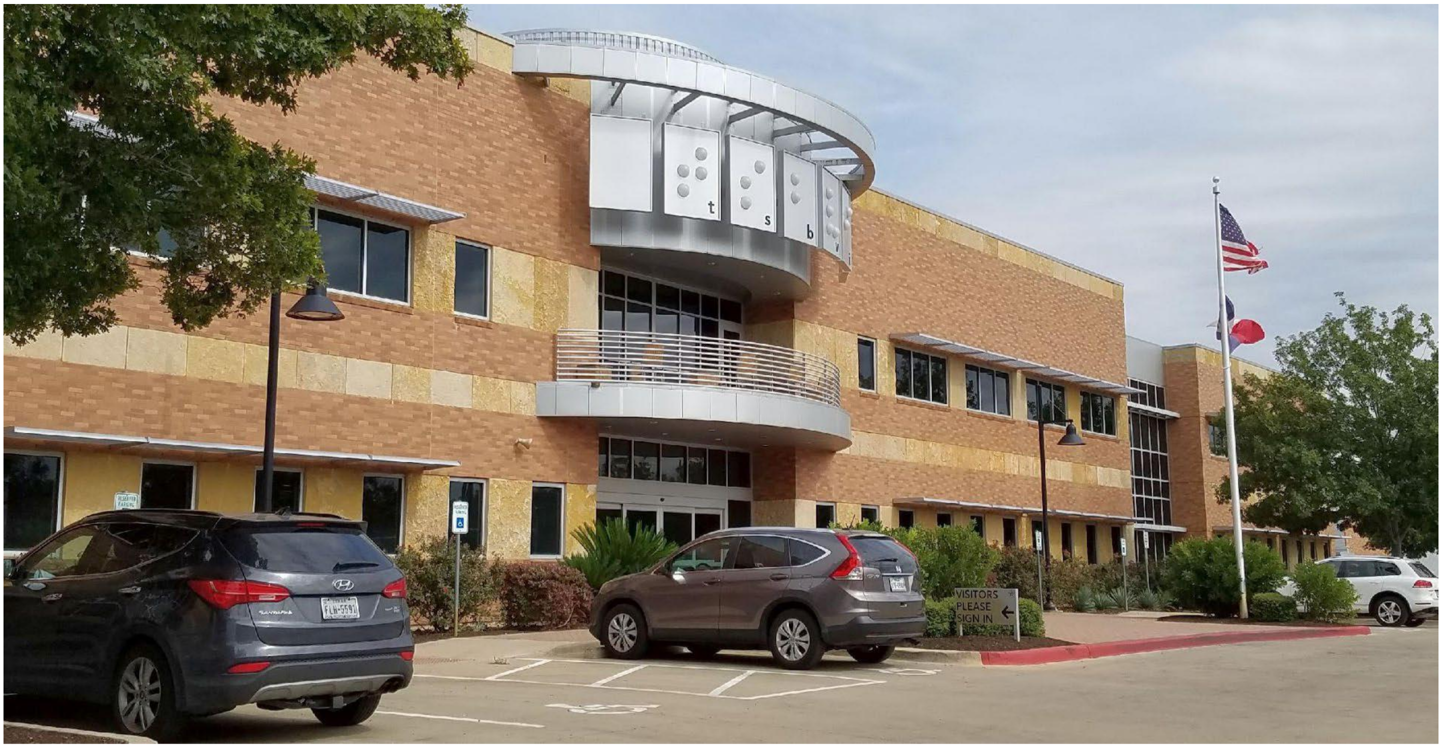


Photo of the main entrance of TSBVI

Transformation and the Blind Children’s Program

Keisha Rowe, Director, Office of Independence Services,
Health and Human Services Commission

Abstract: This article gives a summary of services offered by the Blind Children’s Program.

Keywords: blind, visually impaired, children

The Blind Children’s Program (BCP) gives families the chance to plan for their child’s growth and skills development with trained specialists. Since the program moved from the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) to HHSC in September 2016, BCP staff have been able to work closely with other HHS programs to ensure Texans have access to the services they need in order to reach their fullest potential.

While our office locations and phone numbers have changed, our services remain the same. BCP is part of the Office of Independent Services, along with the Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment program, the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services program and the Independent Living Services program.

The Parent’s Role

Parent and BCP staff work in partnership, using a team approach to build the best plan for the child. When families take an active role in designing services for their children, children succeed. Blind-children’s specialists and rehabilitation assistants rely on families to share any concerns and barriers that may be preventing their children from obtaining the skills needed to master their goals. By providing current medical and education information, discussing their children’s challenges and needs, and sharing joys and successes, parents help tailor services to fit their child’s unique needs, growth and development.

Our Specialists

Blind-children’s specialists:

- Help children develop confidence and skills.
- Provide training to increase independence and participation in vocational activities.
- Provide support and training to parents and caretakers.
- Help families in the vocational discovery and development process.
- Provide information about additional resources.

BCP also has a DeafBlind specialist who:

- Develops strategies to support children with combined vision and hearing loss.
- Helps families find and access local, state and national resources.
- Provides training and webinars for families, service providers and education interveners.
- Works with community and resource agencies to provide services.

The BCP team is eager to work with you to ensure your child has the tools and training they need to reach their fullest potential and be successful.

BCP is committed to providing high-quality services. To learn more, call 512-438-2404, or e-mail hhs.texas.gov/blind-childrens-program.

Vocational Rehabilitation Update

Cheryl Fuller, Director Vocational Rehabilitation Division, Texas Workforce Commission

Abstract: The author describes a few recent changes in the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the new summer work experience program for students with disabilities.

Key words: disability, blind, visually impaired, Vocational Rehabilitation, Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program, Summer Earn and Learn, Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services Commission

It's been an exciting year in the Texas Workforce Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs. Just over one year ago, the VR program and staff were transferred to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), as mandated in Senate Bill (SB) 208, 84th Texas Legislature. TWC welcomed VR staff and worked diligently to ensure a smooth transition for staff and customers. On Oct. 1, 2017, TWC completed another SB 208 requirement: combining Blind Services and Rehabilitation Services divisions into one Vocational Rehabilitation Division. The new division features a streamlined structure that retains specialization in serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired at the state, regional and local level. VR counselors from the legacy Blind Services division will continue to serve customers with visual impairments. VR counselors will continue to specialize in serving students and those with needs in other areas of disability such as deaf and hard of hearing, and neurodevelopmental disorders. The newly combined VR Division will continue its high standards of service by providing qualified staff to serve all customers, while also seeking opportunities for efficiency, consistency and improved customer service.

TWC-VRS is also continuing to implement the many changes to the VR program that were enacted by Congress in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in its final implementing regulations, released in the fall of 2016. One of the required changes is that each state must establish a single starting age for students with disabilities who are interested in applying for VR services. Previously, Blind Services and Rehabilitation Services divisions had different starting ages for students. Earlier this year, TWC held public meetings around the state to seek feedback on the proposed change to establish age 14 as the standard starting age to begin receiving VR services. This is an earlier starting age than the VR programs in most states, but it aligns the Texas VR program with the age by which students in special education programs in Texas schools must begin transition planning. This change became effective on Oct. 1, 2017. TWC-VRS has been working with the

Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program (Blind Children’s Program) at the Health and Human Services Commission to ensure that this change was communicated to students and families participating in the Blind Children’s Program. We wanted to ensure that families with children ages 10–14 interested in VR Services were referred to TWC-VRS for a determination of eligibility before the change in starting age. In addition to coordinating referrals between the Blind Children’s Program and TWC-VRS, both programs are working to discuss opportunities for joint activities, such as group skills trainings.

One of the most exciting programs launched by TWC this year is the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program for students with disabilities who want the opportunity to gain work experience. In collaboration with the 28 local workforce development boards, more than 1,500 Texas students with disabilities participated in a paid work experience with a local employer between June and August. Staff members have received numerous stories from students, parents and employers about the powerful impact of this program. Some students did such a great job that they were hired by their host employers and continue to have a part-time job during the school year. Here are their stories:

- Through participation in Summer Earn and Learn, one young man completed a weeklong Job Readiness Boot Camp led by WIOA youth contractor, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas. He is quiet and shy but demonstrated remarkable progress including leading group discussions. Over the summer, he received work experience through a job internship at an H-E-B grocery store in South Austin, where he has continued to develop skills that complement his strong work ethic and customer-focused mindset. His hard work and dedication impressed his supervisors so much that they want to hire him full time. “I wanted to do it to experience what a job is,” says this VR client, “so when I am ready to have a job, I will know what to do and am able to work. The other employees were so nice to me, it touched my heart.”
- There is this note from a mother whose daughter participated in Summer Earn and Learn: “Thank you for telling us about the Summer Earn and Learn program! From the time she found out about it, my daughter was so excited about being in a supported job situation where she could learn job skills, gain work experience, and get paid. She was especially excited when she found she would be placed at CVS Pharmacy. It complemented her education of an Associate’s Degree of Science, as she is interested in a career as a pharmacy technician. Because of her participation in the program, her family and friends have seen her blossom with self-confidence and a sense of belonging. Thank you for helping her gain the skills that she needs to find a job that she loves.”

TWC plans to repeat this program in future years, so stay tuned for an upcoming issue of TX SenseAbilities when we will share more information about Summer Earn and Learn 2018! To find the VR office nearest you, please go to http://www.twc.state.tx.us/find-locations.

Child Medical Grants Available From United Health Care Children’s Foundation

Abstract: This article provides information on grants available to assist children in obtaining health-related services not covered or not fully covered by their family’s health insurance plan.

Key words: Blind, visually impaired, medical grants, United Health Care Children’s Foundation

Families in need of financial assistance for child medical care costs are encouraged to apply today for a United Healthcare Children’s Foundation (UHCCF) grant. Qualifying families can receive up to $5,000 per grant, with a lifetime maximum of $10,000 per child, to help pay for their child’s health care treatments, services, or equipment not covered, or not fully covered, by their commercial health insurance plan.

Families frequently use UHCCF grants to help pay for treatments associated with medical conditions such as cancer, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, diabetes, hearing loss, autism, cystic fibrosis, Down syndrome, ADHD and cerebral palsy. For example, families have used grants for physical, occupational and speech therapy, counseling services, surgeries, prescriptions, wheelchairs, orthotics, eyeglasses and hearing aids. To be eligible for a grant, a child must be 16 years of age or younger.

Families must meet economic guidelines, reside in the United States and have a commercial health insurance plan. Grants are available for medical expenses families have incurred 60 days before the date of application as well as for ongoing and future medical needs. Families do not need to have insurance through United Healthcare to be eligible. Parents or legal guardians are encouraged to apply today at www.UHCCF.org.

Reprinted from Parent to Parent Newsletter.

TSBVI Summer Programs

Excerpts from TSBVI website

Abstract: This article provides information about TSBVI Summer Programs.

Key Words: Blind, Visually Impaired, TSBVI, summer programs

TSBVI Summer Programs (June– July) include a variety of enrichment classes for VI students of all ability levels. Classes vary in length from four days to five weeks. The Summer Programs schedule changes each year. The deadline for Summer Program applications is Feb. 14 and should be submitted by the local TVI as early as possible.

For additional information regarding TSBVI Summer Programs, please refer to the TSBVI website at http://www.tsbvi.edu/summer-programs or contact the Summer Programs Administration Team Phoebe Williams at 512-206-9241 or Wendy Erickson at 512-206-9332.

Elementary Summer Enrichment

Students in this program practice and apply skills they have learned at home and at school, within the context of fun activities. In past summers, students have enjoyed activities such as touring a farm, doing a scavenger hunt in a Chinese market, visiting museums, and exploring a steam engine. Each class is built around a high-interest theme for this age level such as “Project STEM,” “Time Travelers,” “Cook & Create,” “Transition to Middle School,” “Nature Detectives” and “Lost in Space!”

Students have opportunities to practice Expanded Core Curriculum skills as they make and follow schedules, create shopping lists, manage a simple budget, keep up with belongings, organize materials, measure ingredients, write thank-you letters, and interact with others. An invaluable part of the program is the opportunity to interact with other students with visual impairments. Sharing experiences about challenges they face at home and school can alleviate feelings of isolation and increase confidence. Students begin early friendships that may continue for years.

Secondary Enrichment (SE)

Secondary Enrichment (SE) offers countless opportunities for fun and learning for middle or high school students with visual impairments. The topics offered vary, but classes may include beginning food preparation, running a catering business, general physical fitness to PE for SBOE credit, art, theater arts, career education, technology, and travel in the community. Classes give students opportunities to develop their academic and technology skills, practice orientation and mobility, and enhance their social, independent living, and self-determination skills, both on and off campus.

SE classes are for middle or high school students with visual impairments who meet these criteria:

- 12 years of age or older, up through the summer after their high school graduation.
- Able to participate well in group activities, with limited one-on-one assistance.
- Moderately to largely independent in areas such as eating, dressing, personal hygiene, communication, and mobility.
- Have no challenging behaviors that interfere with the instruction of self or others.
- Can complete the full length of the class to which they are admitted.
- Secondary students who function four or more grade levels below their age expectation should apply for the Practical Experiences in Expanded Core (PEEC).

Practical Experiences in Expanded Core (PEEC)

Practical Experiences in Expanded Core (PEEC) offers a fun, dynamic, learning experience for your student who:

- Is age 6–22.
- Currently receives some or all instruction in an alternative academic setting (e.g., resource, life skills classroom).
- May benefit from supports with communication, social, and independent living skills.

- Is able to be away from home for one to two weeks.
- Can participate safely in small group activities with moderate support.

In the PEEC Program, students are grouped into self-contained classes of about five students of similar age and ability. Students will participate in a variety of activities and projects, both on and off campus, that address such skills as:

- Shopping
- Working in the kitchen
- Personal care
- Vocational skills
- Community transportation
- Practical academics (math, literacy, etc.)
- Concept development
- Physical fitness
- Peer and adult interactions
- Problem-solving
- Choice-making and self-advocacy
- Recreation and leisure

Summer Work Experience in Austin, Texas (SWEAT) Ages 17–22

June 11– July 13

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired is excited to collaborate with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to host Summer Work Experience in Austin, Texas (SWEAT). SWEAT is a five-week experiential learning program designed to prepare students for independence and success after high school. This program will provide:

- Intensive training in Expanded Core Curricular skills with a particular focus on independent living skills, orientation and mobility skills, and social skills.
- Lessons on relevant employability skills.
- An individual, paid job opportunity in the Austin community supported by a job coach.

Requirements to Apply

- Students should function within approximately three years of grade level.
- Students should be able to work alone at a job placement.
- Students must be on the VR services caseload of TWC. It is not sufficient to be on their children’s caseload. If you are uncertain about your status, contact your TWC Transition Counselor as soon as possible.
- In order to determine learning goals for SWEAT, students are required to participate in Pre-SWEAT.

Student Expectations

- Students are expected to complete in-class assignments and homework assignments related to employability and independent living skills.
- Students are expected to use a cane for mobility at all appropriate times.
- Students are expected to spend weekends on campus during SWEAT. Students will be given permission for one off-campus weekend during the program.
- Students will earn a training fee approximately equivalent to the minimum wage after deductions. From this fee, students will be

expected to pay a minimal amount for living expenses. The purpose of this activity is to help students learn to budget and pay bills. Beyond these expenses, students may use their earnings as they wish.

Pre-SWEAT April 21–23

Pre-SWEAT is designed to help students develop an awareness of their strengths and needs in key areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum prior to beginning SWEAT. It also provides the opportunity for SWEAT staff to begin developing relationships with students. Students will collaborate with a job coach and an O&M instructor to complete assessment activities in the following areas:

- Assistive Technology
- Independent Living Skills
- Social Skills
- Orientation and Mobility

Afterward, students will meet with their job coaches to develop goals to guide their learning for the duration of the five-week SWEAT program.

Working and Living in the Community (WALIC) Ages 16–22

June 18–July 13

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired is excited to provide students with vocational and independent living experiences this summer through WALIC. In WALIC, emphasis is placed on developing independent living and community access skills, as well as promoting personal responsibility and initiative, during work and throughout all other activities.

Objectives

WALIC will provide opportunities for students to:

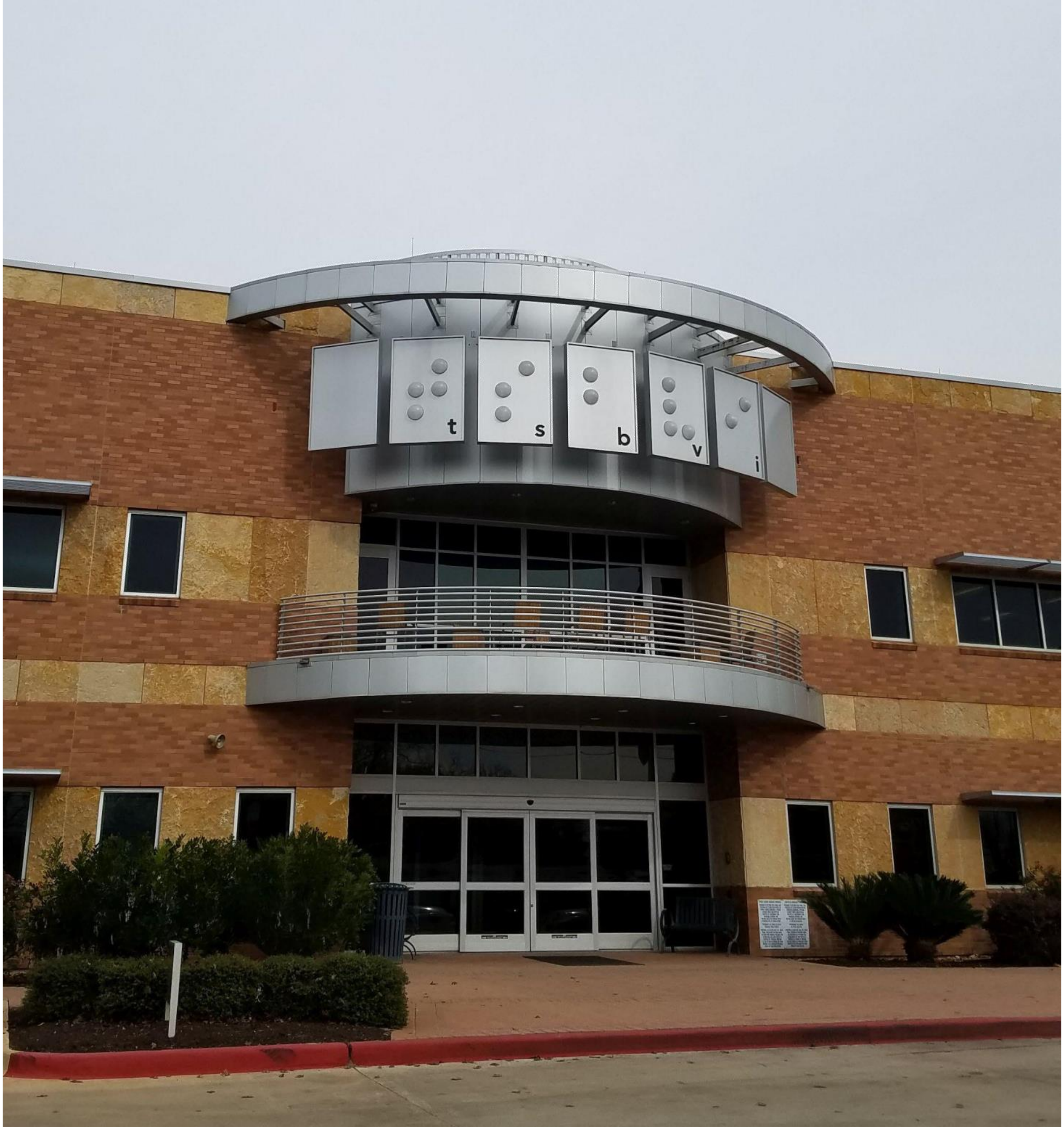
- Learn a variety of work routines with the support of a job coach.
- Practice social skills necessary to interact with a supervisor and co-workers.
- Manage a $30 weekly stipend received for their work by budgeting, shopping, and choosing recreational activities.
- Learn about typical household bills, writing and cashing checks, and the cost of apartments.
- Live in dorms with 24-hour supervision and practice independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning, dressing, and personal hygiene.

Requirements to Apply

- Students must be 16–22 years of age.
- Students must be able to work for five hours in a given day with moderate support from a job coach. Students work a total of approximately 16 hours per week.
- Students should be fairly independent in their dressing, eating, toileting, hygiene, and communication abilities.
- Students should not have challenging behaviors that interfere with the instruction of self or others. If you are unsure about your student's behavior-support needs regarding the WALIC program, please contact us to discuss appropriate placement.

Student Expectations

Students need to participate for the full four weeks of the summer program. If you have questions or concerns about a student's ability to do this, please contact Sara Merritt, Summer Program Principal.



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